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eMag



Evolution is a byword in the games industry. Games, characters and franchises have all adapted over the years to keep pace with technology and the changing needs of gamers.

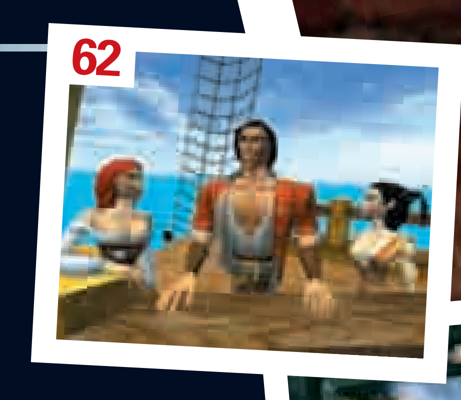
Street Fighter is different. Since its arcade release in 1987 the franchise has stoically resisted change. The *Street Fighter* series has always been about a peerless 2D beat-'em-up where the focus is squarely on the gameplay.

To celebrate *Street Fighter*'s fifteenth anniversary (albeit a year late), Capcom has released *Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition* – a fitting tribute to the series and a superb reminder of why it has survived this long. Whatever your social plans, cancel them and join this party instead.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor


00-15
YEAH!


NO
GAMESTM





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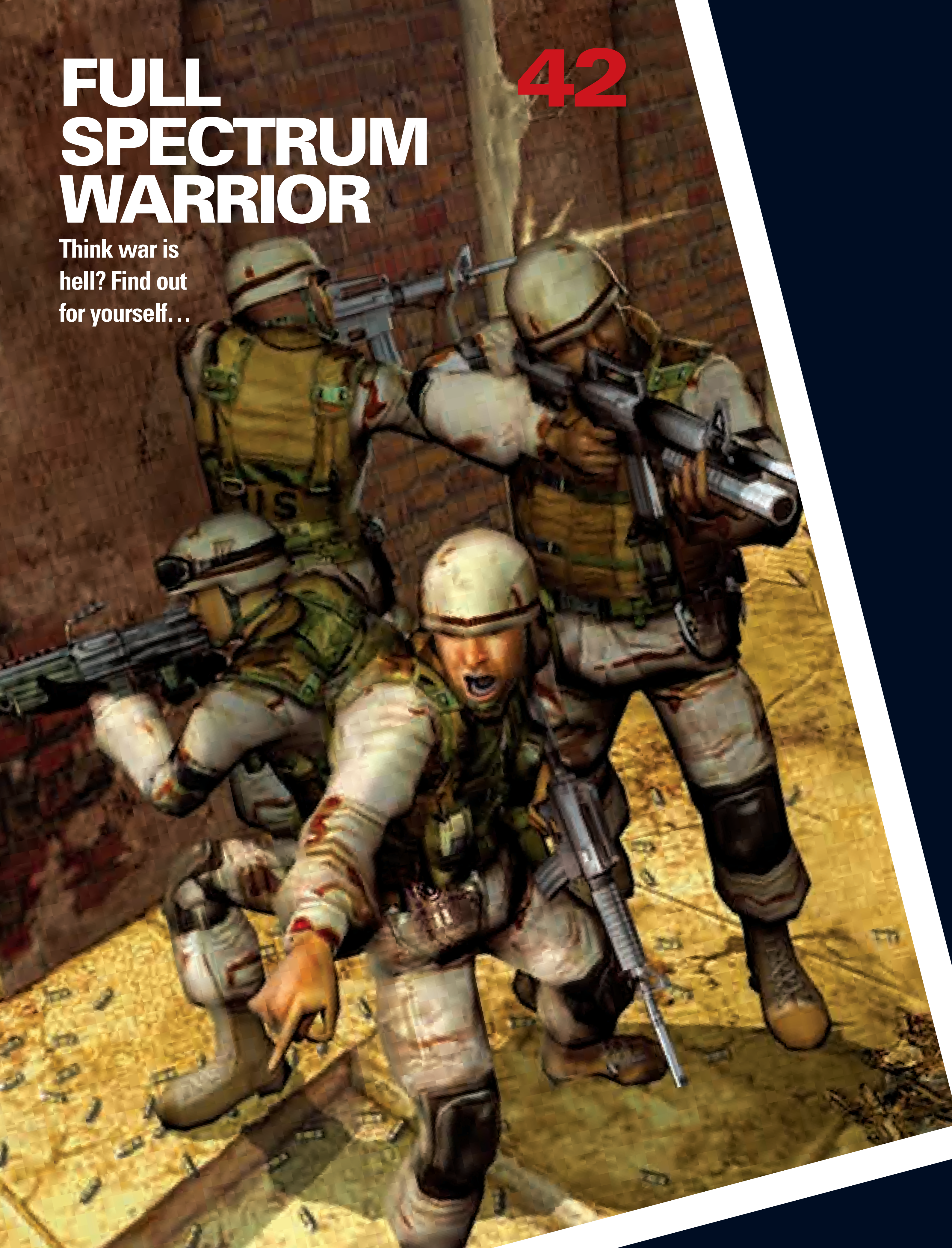
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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



SO WHAT DOES 2004 HOLD IN STORE?

BRAVE NEW YEAR

Even as the strains of *Auld Lang Syne* were dying down, rumours about what 2004 may bring for the videogaming world were flying around. Industry sources and internet users are already buzzing with all sorts of theories about the direction 'the big three' will take over the coming months.

Microsoft has been under close scrutiny, though it has come under fire on some forums. Everything from major Rare titles (including *Kameo*) being canned to the likes of *Perfect Dark Zero* moving to Xbox 2 has incensed some gamers. The possible lack of backwards compatibility for Xbox 2 has also infuriated many Xbox owners, as has the rumour that the next Microsoft console may not have a hard drive.

Nintendo will be hoping that 2004 is a good year. Last year saw huge success for the GBA SP but the GameCube continues to struggle. The unveiling of the company's new console at this year's E3 will surely be Nintendo's key event. Suggestions that the machine will be the GameCube successor N5 seem to have been quashed by Nintendo's president, Satora Iwata, who has said that the new product will "become the third pillar, next to GameCube and Game Boy Advance." The big money is on an EyeToy-like device that will revolve around the little-talked-about *Stage Debut*.

As far as Sony is concerned the PS3 appears to have been placed on the back burner and all eyes are now looking towards the PSP handheld and PSX. "The PSX helped Sony at the end of 2003 by selling over 100,000 units at quite a high-end price, further bolstering the PS2," said Chris Keegan, technical director of Climax Solent. "The PSP is currently turning heads and promises to give the GBA a good run for its money; it's a very sexy piece of kit."

One thing that looks certain is that online gaming will continue to prosper – particularly with the arrival of *Halo 2* and *Gran Turismo 4* – and that EyeToy will remain a success. "Xbox Live continues to grow at a steady rate and Sony's EyeToy has been a great inspiration to the gaming world and will continue to grow," said Adrian Fernandez-Lacey of TDK Marketing UK.

Of course, with the games industry being notorious for delays and slipped release dates, we may end up waiting longer than planned for some things. But 2004 is looking good regardless.

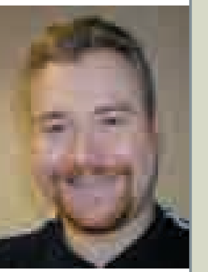
MYSTIC MEN

To get the inside track on what 2004 will bring for gamers we spoke to three industry insiders – the retailer, the developer, and the publishers' association…


Croft: PSP release exciting news for consumers.

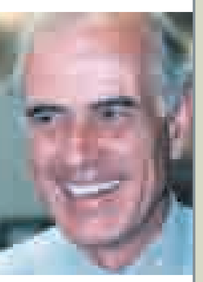
ALEX CROFT, BUYING DIRECTOR, GAME

"It's always difficult to predict where the market will be at the start of a year. Sony has just announced its target worldwide release date for the PSP, which promises to be a very exciting event for both us and consumers, in addition to the release of the PSX in the next few months. These two pieces of hardware, together with the continued strength of PC games in 2003 and the increasing popularity of Xbox Live, [will] ensure that 2004 should prove a year in which games gain even more profile, and continue to appeal to different audiences. We're hoping that there will be even more new titles this year along the lines of *Dance: UK*, the *Dancing Stage* series and more from the EyeToy brand."


Brown: no new consoles but plenty of hype.

MARTYN BROWN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, TEAM 17 SOFTWARE

"I think it's a year or so too early to think of new home console platforms hitting the shelves, but I'd fully expect more willy-waving from the big three during 2004 in the pre-launch hype. Given the lead stolen by Microsoft in terms of a quality, solid online gaming experience I think you'll see Live continue to gather momentum, and it will be interesting to see if Sony plays catch-up or not. There's a number of massive titles due in the year and I for one would like to see some publishers brave enough to release outside the traditional bloodfest around November where so many top titles failed to perform due to limited shelf-space next to the mega-marketed big-hitters, although you can't really blame EA for dominating it."

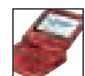

Bennett: investment in idea development needed.

ROGER BENNETT, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ELSPA

"I'm an 'issues' man, concerned with maintaining best practice within the industry and high-quality perceptions for it publicly and politically. We should all be very proud of the progress we've made in the UK, which is well ahead of most, if not all, countries in the world where games are accepted culturally in the mainstream of the screen entertainment mix and a valued economic factor. Despite a successful year, the industry needs to accept that collectively it is responsible for its own destiny. Collaboration and transparency in developing a structure to attract investment in bringing new ideas to the point of development is urgently needed. The challenge will be how to get it to that point in the first place."

Data Stream

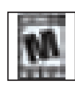
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



NICE LITTLE EARNER

Nintendo has now shipped over 10 million GBAs to stores in Europe. Buoyed by an impressive selection of titles – including *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, Advance Wars 2* and *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* – Nintendo promoted its machine as the ultimate Christmas gift. Despite competition from Nokia's N-Gage and the ever-nearing PSP, Nintendo's handheld seems unstoppable. The GBA is presently the second best-selling console in the UK, suffering none of the recent sales dips affecting its peers.





ID OR ELSE

A US retail trade body is to police the sale of mature games to under-17s. The Interactive Entertainment Merchants' Association (IEMA) aims to get retailers carrying out ID checks on gamers they suspect to be underage by the end of the year. "This announcement is a great holiday gift for American families," said senator Joe Lieberman "Parents are working hard to raise their kids right, but they need help." Several chains are already supporting the plan, including Toys R Us and Wal-Mart.



A BARGAIN AT

RUMOURS ARE LAID TO REST AS SAMMY BUYS LARGE STOCK OF SEGA SHARES

It would appear that Sammy has finally taken the first step towards a possible acquisition of SEGA. After SEGA allegedly rejected proposals from Sammy last May, Sammy has now managed to buy shares from CSK, which was SEGA's biggest shareholder and one-time parent company.

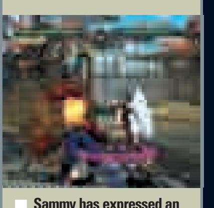
Sammy's purchase has cost it a staggering ¥45 billion (£243 million) and has gone ahead despite the fact the company currently has debts of around ¥800 million (over £4 million). Nevertheless, the move is an aggressive one, with the Pachinko maker already announcing its plans for SEGA's future. A recent interview with Bloomberg Japan revealed that Sammy president and CEO, Hajime Satomi, is adamant that SEGA should focus more on arcades and less on home consoles.

"Our earning capability is restricted to the arcade market," Satomi-san explained. "So we hope to strengthen that aspect of our business through the partnership with SEGA." While some might be wary of the shift towards arcade games, for Sammy it's an obvious route. SEGA has already posted a ¥2.5 billion loss (£13 million) for the last six months of 2003's fiscal year. Compare this to the £30 million profit it made in its arcade division in the same period and Sammy's current direction makes perfect sense.

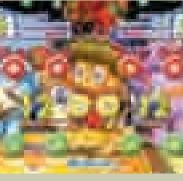
One of Satomi-san's biggest aims for SEGA's arcade division is for it to use Sammy's Atomiswave system for future games. The Atomiswave is an extremely cheap cartridge-based, JAMMA-compatible arcade board that uses the same CPU as SEGA's Dreamcast console and Naomi arcade boards. "Its low cost means that even a single play at ¥10 [five pence] a game could turn a profit and we can then sell it in third-world countries as well," Satomi-san explained.

With Sammy holding the largest share in SEGA's stock its requests seem inevitable, even though Satomi-san will be the first to admit that the purchase hasn't pleased everyone. "It's true that our original merger proposal was rejected, and that some SEGA executives have been opposed to the stock acquisition," he said. "However, the majority of SEGA's management team has been friendly and co-operative throughout the past several months."

Satomi-san, however, has made it clear



Sammy has expressed an interest in SEGA's arcade titles.



Console titles may lose out in favour of Pachinko.





Virtua Fighter is likely to survive a takeover.

£243 MILLION

that he will try to achieve Sammy's aims whatever the cost. "If [Sammy's] vision does not agree with that of SEGA's, then we might consider taking more shares," he said. This is feasible, as under Japanese law a majority stockholder only needs a 33 per cent stake to have decision-making power. Add to this the fact that Satomi-san is bound to join the SEGA board within a matter of months and it's likely that Sammy's dream will soon become reality.

But even with Satomi-san's new focus on the arcade division, we're sure this doesn't spell the end for SEGA's home-console titles. Admittedly, less popular licences are unlikely to feature in Sammy's plans and we wouldn't be surprised if SEGA's under-performing sports titles will soon come under fire. However, you can be sure that we'll see the likes of *Virtua Fighter* and *Sonic* for some time to come.

"OUR EARNING CAPABILITY IS RESTRICTED TO THE ARCADE MARKET. WE HOPE TO STRENGTHEN THAT ASPECT OF OUR BUSINESS THROUGH THE PARTNERSHIP WITH SEGA"

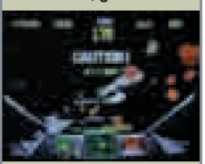
HAJIME SATOMI, PRESIDENT AND CEO, SAMMY

RELEASE THESE NOW

With Sammy wanting to focus more on SEGA's arcade division, here are just a few of SEGA's classic games that we'd love to see remade.

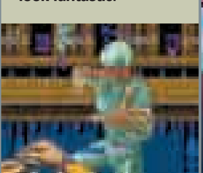
AFTERBURNER II
Come on SEGA, bring back *Afterburner*. With today's technology (and maybe a G-Loc-styled seat) you could create the ultimate thrill ride. Just thinking about it makes us giddy with excitement.

STAR WARS
Possibly one of the greatest *Star Wars* games ever made; and with *Episode III* due next year there's really no excuse not to bring this back. How about re-enacting *Episode II*'s freefall scene? Ah, go on.



VIRTUAL ON
Bound to be a sure-fire hit with Mecha-loving Japanese gamers. We'd like to see bigger arenas and even more powerful weapons – how about it SEGA? Oh, and make it easily translatable to the PS2 to ensure maximum success.

SHINOBI
Forget about those 3D adventures, we want something that's classic old-school. Nothing used to test your reflexes like *Shinobi*, and a graphically enhanced update could look fantastic.





NOT ANOTHER...

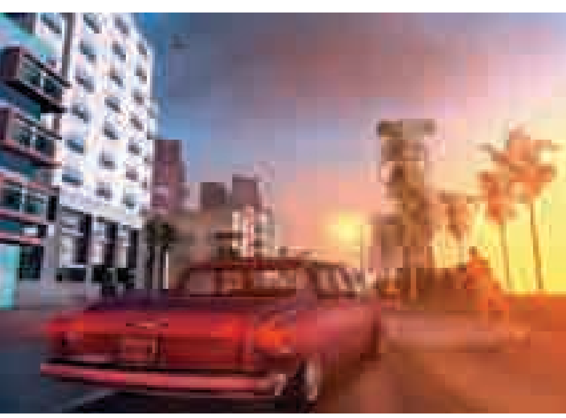
MANHUNT UNDER FIRE DOWN UNDER

ROCKSTAR IN TROUBLE AGAIN

The latest Rockstar controversy comes courtesy of the distinctly below-average *Manhunt*. It seems that New Zealand's Media Classification Office has taken offence at the game's content and has now banned it from the country.

"It's a game where the only thing you do is kill everybody you see," said New Zealand's chief censor, Bill Hastings. "You have to at least acquiesce in these murders and possibly tolerate or even move towards enjoying them, which is injurious to public health." Hastings' biggest complaint about the game concerned the snuff-like killings you're able to pull off. "When you go for the 'hot' kill, you actually see the snuff film," he said. "With a plastic bag, for example, you see the victim's mouth gasping for air inside the bag."

Rockstar has refused to comment on the ban, though it's quite possible that a positive response may well be forthcoming. After all, the developer has already removed a line of dialogue from *Vice City* after the Haitian community made several complaints about it, although Rockstar was quick to point out that in the case of the *GTA* sequel it had "strived to create a videogame experience with a certain degree of realism, which we believe is our right."



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



Q JUMPING

Almost two years to the day since Matsushita launched its stylish Q system in Japan, the company announced it was to cease production of the hybrid GameCube/DVD player. After initially enjoying a warm reception from the gadget-hungry Japanese market, the machine has seen sales steadily decline. Despite a number of price cuts the system couldn't sustain a viable level of demand. The news coincides with the release of Sony's multi-functional PSX, which once again sees a next-generation console crossbred with the latest DVD technology.





MODEL GAMERS

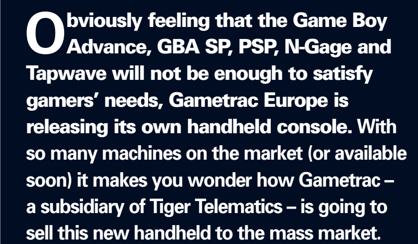
In an attempt to shed gaming's geeky image, Gamer.tv's Search For The Sexiest Gamer campaign reached its climax just before Christmas. The two lucky winners – Rachel Doherty from Ireland and Sid Knuttson from Sweden – were honoured at an event hosted by model-turned-TV presenter Vernon Kay. Over a thousand gamers were put to the public vote online, with a panel of judges choosing the winners based on sex appeal and, of course, gaming knowledge. "They really know their *Mario Kart*s from their *Halos*," said Kay of the finalists. None more hardcore…





HANDS ON (AGAIN)

THE HANDHELD BAND-WAGON KEEPS ON ROLLING



Camera? GPS? Bluetooth? The Gametrac's got it all…

Obviously feeling that the Game Boy Advance, GBA SP, PSP, N-Gage and Tapwave will not be enough to satisfy gamers' needs, Gametrac Europe is releasing its own handheld console. With so many machines on the market (or available soon) it makes you wonder how Gametrac – a subsidiary of Tiger Telematics – is going to sell this new handheld to the mass market.

It would appear that the Gametrac's 'unique selling points' are GPS positioning and various data communication functions, as well as the music and movie playback that is rapidly gaining in popularity. If that wasn't enough, Gametrac will also have its own built-in digital camera.

While little has been revealed about the machine's hardware capabilities, we do know that it features a 4.2 x 3.5cm screen that offers 320 x 200 resolution in 16-bit colour, and has four face buttons and two shoulder buttons. The camera will be on the bottom of the machine, but its power has not yet been revealed (although we're not expecting something similar to a mobile phone camera). Like Nokia's N-Gage, the Gametrac will have removable SD memory cards and feature Bluetooth support, and should cost around £120 (though this won't include a SIM card).

Gametrac has based its technology on Microsoft's Windows CE .NET operating system, which should make it easy to operate. Mike Carrender, CEO of Tiger Telematics, is confident that the new Windows platform will be more than appropriate. "We chose the Windows CE .NET platform because the world already knows of its comprehensive, user-friendly and familiar access memory. This, coupled with a global support infrastructure and striving design ethos, was an important element within our decision-making process."



Gametrac Europe is certainly keen to push the Gametrac and has already secured a lucrative sponsorship deal with the Jordan Formula One team, as well as contracting UK-based electronics supplier Plextex to ship 25,000 units for the second quarter of 2004. The range of games for the machine has yet to be announced, but at the moment Tiger seems to be concentrating on selling the Gametrac's GPS positioning as a key feature. It's certainly a novel idea and will allow parents to keep an eye on their children's whereabouts, but we're not convinced that the industry is ready for another console, no matter how innovative it might be.

As ever, more news when we get it.



NINTENDO'S SUPERSTAR GETS IMMORTALISED IN WAX

THE WAX WORKS

Forget the likes of Sonic the Hedgehog and Lara Croft, there's only one truly legendary videogame character. Nintendo's portly plumber Mario has proved to be an enduring star, and a waxwork model of the moustachioed hero was unveiled at the Hollywood Wax Museum in December.

To celebrate the release of new Mario titles and the fact he's appeared in 67 games, Mario's statue will stand alongside some of entertainment's biggest stars. "With four new *Mario* games in stores right before the holidays, this truly is the 'Season of Mario'," said George Harrison, senior vice president of Nintendo of America. "Mario's induction into the Hollywood Wax Museum further establishes his importance as a pop-culture icon."

When you consider that the adventurous plumber's titles have sold more than 170 million units, his inauguration seems appropriate. Mario himself was delighted with his recent honour and 'told' an excited crowd: "My fans always said that no-one could hold a candle to me. Now they'd better not."

We're not too sure how Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss feel about the waxwork replicas of *The Matrix*'s Neo and Trinity being replaced by the ever-popular plumber in the foyer of the museum, but we're sure they won't be holding any grudges. Their models are merely being moved for 'cleaning'.



Make your own Village People joke…

games™ THE TOP FIVE

GREAT VIDEOGAME LOVERS



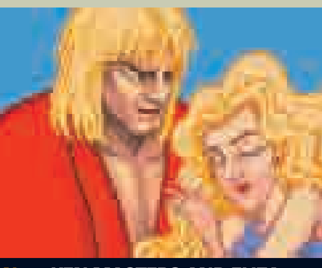
No.5 MICKEY AND MINNIE MOUSE

The most innocent couple in history



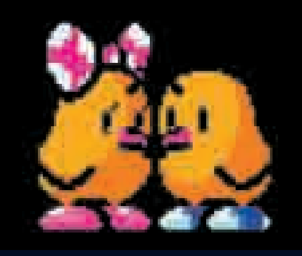
No.4 CODY AND JESSICA HAGGAR

Shame Guy stole her away, eh?



No.3 KEN MASTERS AND ELIZA

Girls always love a macho man



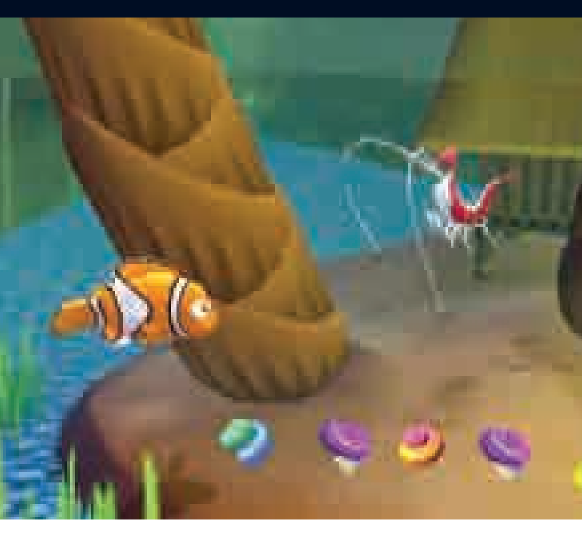
No.2 TIKI AND PHEE-PHEE

Kiwis in love – ain't that cute?



No.1 MARIO & PRINCESS PEACH

Even a plumber can bag a princess



CRACKDOWN ON THE SOFTWARE PIRATES WHO TRIED TO RUIN CHRISTMAS

TIS THE SEASON (TO STEAL SOFTWARE)

As part of a continued effort to curb videogames piracy, police raids during November and December resulted in an huge number of arrests. The operations were overseen by the Trading Standards Institute and the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers' Association (ELSPA). Over £13 million of counterfeit games were seized, with the largest amount (worth a staggering £10 million) found in Ingliston Market in Edinburgh.

Cynics may well say that with the cost of today's games, figures like this are not surprising, but piracy is piracy no matter what the excuse and it's something ELSPA's director general, Roger Bennett, feels very strongly about.

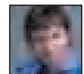
"The colossal success we have accomplished in the run-up to Christmas shows not only our determination to eradicate second-rate, poor-quality counterfeit computer and videogames that will only disappoint the consumer, but it's also a marvellous demonstration of the excellent working relationships we have with Trading Standards and the police," Bennett said.

With money tight at Christmas, it's unsurprising that many people turn to piracy as a way to buy the many games they wouldn't normally be able to afford. Markets and car-boot sales continue to be popular places to shift illegal goods, and consumers should be suspicious of anyone offering them a bargain that seems too good to be true.

Popular website www.gamestyle.net has even taken some undercover pictures of a new flip-top hack that makes Sony's PlayStation2 even easier (and cheaper) to chip. As more chipped consoles become available, the struggle against piracy is sure to intensify.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



NAMED AND FAMED

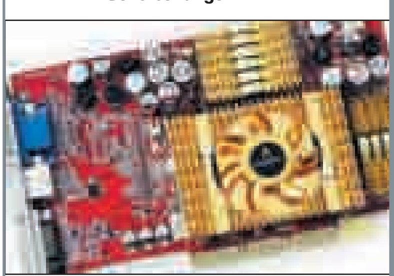
Brothers Richard and David Darling and their father Jim have joined *Tomb Raider* creator Toby Gard in ELSPA's videogame industry Hall of Fame. The brothers founded Codemasters as teenagers in 1986 (with their father as chairman), and over the last couple of decades have evolved the company into a major industry player. Now employing over 400 people worldwide, the Warwickshire-based developer and publisher has offices across Europe and the US. The award was presented at the videogame industry's annual 'InDin' dinner.





JOIN THE CLUB

***Painkiller* has become the latest visually spectacular title to enter NVIDIA's 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' programme alongside PC gaming's graphical elite. Polish developer People Can Fly will work closely with the hardware producer to ensure the game engine's performance is optimised for use with the NVIDIA range of graphics cards. While this is great news for the majority of PC gamers running NVIDIA hardware, computer owners must be getting sick of games favouring particular cards – *Halo*, for instance, runs far better using ATI's Radeon hardware rather than NVIDIA's GeForce range.**





Nintendo's iQue has been joined by the PS2 in China.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

One is popular game character Donkey Kong who kick-started Mario's career, the other is successful character actor Ron Perlman. Can you tell which is which?



GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD

SONY CELEBRATES ANOTHER MILESTONE IN THE WEST BUT THERE'S TROUBLE IN THE EAST

With the festive period finally over, Sony is able to look back on another successful year for its PlayStation2. In the run-up to Christmas, the manufacturer revealed that the three-year-old PS2 had achieved a staggering five million sales in the UK alone. "We are delighted to reach and pass the five million," said Ray Maguire, managing director of Sony Computer Entertainment UK.

"The rate of sale is incredible and shows that PlayStation2 remains the console of choice. Our established market leadership position has no doubt been bolstered by having the largest amount of games and a growing online presence," he said.

Unsurprisingly, the weeks either side of Christmas brought another successful period for Sony, and the PS2 totally dominated the holiday season with sales of over 185,000 units – roughly double that of the Xbox and four times that of the GameCube.

Despite Sony's success in the UK, things haven't been so straightforward on the other side of the globe. One of the company's biggest worries at the moment is a patent-infringement lawsuit brought by a South Korean businessman. Na Jae-hwan has accused Sony's PS2 of copying a patent for a fee-collection device used in commercial game rooms (South Korean law requires that all game-room owners must have this device attached to their machines). The PS2 has only recently been launched in the territory and has been modified to enable multiplayer games in public gaming rooms; Jae-hwan claims that this modification infringes his copyright. Sony has, of course, denied the allegation.

In addition to trouble in South Korea, the Chinese launch of the PS2 (that was due on 20 December) has also had its fair share of problems, with Sony citing an "unfavourable environment" as the reason for cancelling the proposed launch date. It seems the Chinese government was unwilling to allow a permit for a foreign-manufactured machine to be sold in its country (Nintendo's iQue is exempt). Luckily for Sony, a compromise was eventually reached and the machine appeared in stores on 1 January, with only the excellent *Ico* to accompany it.

PM TOASTS ESC'S NEW FUNDING PROGRAM

BLAIR THANKS THE INDUSTRY

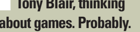
Prime Minister Tony Blair has praised the games industry for its participation in a scheme to help underprivileged children. The Entertainment Software Charity (ESC), which uses the popularity of gaming to train young people and support youth charities, is to help with a government initiative to build new schools

ESC will sponsor a five-year plan entitled 'Schools – Building the Future through Games and Popular Culture' as part of the government's Academies Programme; this makes ESC one of the largest contributors to the scheme. ESC will also provide support for the government's Specialist Schools Initiative by offering eight schools a combined grant of £277,000.

"I would like to thank the computer and videogames industry for the contribution they make to the British economy which is immense and important," the Prime Minister said. "Becoming involved with the Academies Programme will be of enormous importance to the life chances of some of the most disadvantaged kids in the country."

With so many people blaming the games industry for being a bad influence on young people, gestures like this will hopefully help to remove the stigma that has dogged the industry for so long.

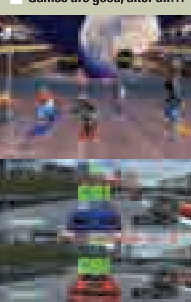




Tony Blair, thinking about games. Probably.



Games *are* good, after all…







Prehistoric romp *BC* will look RenderWare-tastic..



The Movies will use Criterion's middleware.

MOLYNEUX GETS PHYSICAL

LIONHEAD GAMES TO USE CRITERION KIT

Lionhead Studios has become the latest developer to use Criterion Studios' RenderWare Physics in its titles. The deal will see all future Lionhead games exclusively using the enhanced physics engine, while work is currently underway to integrate the middleware into existing titles. Current games that will benefit from the new physics middleware will include dinosaur epic *BC*, the *Sims*-inspired *The Movies* and *Black & White 2*.

"The public has huge expectations of any Lionhead title," said Lionhead's managing director, Peter Molyneux. "Our aim, as it has always been, is to create products that excite and inspire the game-playing public while delivering gameplay that challenges creative boundaries. We have found RenderWare Physics to be the best technology in the field, and Criterion's in-depth knowledge and understanding means that we can deliver what we promise."

This isn't the first time that Criterion's middleware has been fielded out to other developers, and as it continues to gain respect within the industry we feel that deals like this will become commonplace.



GAMES ROOM 101

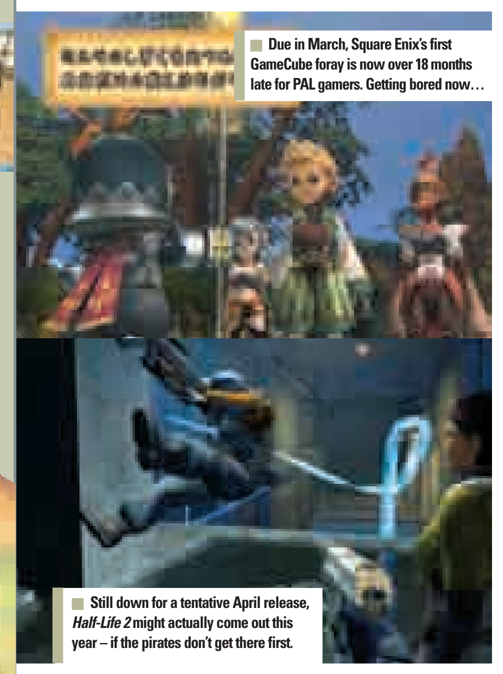
THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO.15: WOT, NO GAMES?

And there we were, thinking that the summer months were the only ones bereft of anything to play. Of course, that's not too bad seeing as some people would rather be outside in the glorious sunshine (what there is of it in Britain), but as it's currently freezing cold and bleak outdoors, we'd much rather be playing games in front of a roaring fire. But it doesn't look as though games publishers share our view…

Apparently, we only buy games at Christmas and Easter – at least, that's what we're told by publishers' release lists. As such, the huge number of games that we were looking forward to just a few months ago have gone, only to be replaced by, well, not much; a handful of titles instead of a bulging sackful. And even those aren't due out until the end of March at the earliest, leaving us to twiddle our thumbs.

What's more, there's virtually nothing beyond that, so we're left hoping that maybe (just maybe) something good will be announced at E3 – something due for Christmas 2004. If only publishers would realise that gaming isn't a seasonal pastime and start producing games for the whole year, we might be able to force our chattering teeth into a smile.



Due in March, Square Enix's first GameCube foray is now over 18 months late for PAL gamers. Getting bored now…

Still down for a tentative April release, *Half-Life 2* might actually come out this year – if the pirates don't get there first.

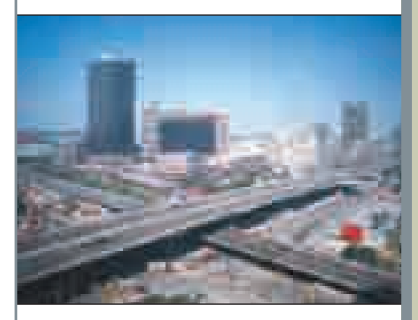
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



EASTERN PROMISE

Over a hundred leading developers and publishers met in Beijing earlier this month to discuss the gaming industry's future in China. The meeting was part of ChinaJoy – a global expo that organisers hope will become mainland Asia's answer to E3, ECTS and Japan's TGS. The slightly delayed Eastern arrival of Sony's PlayStation2 and the release of Nintendo's relatively primitive iQue system offer a ray of hope for Chinese gamers, despite a continuing reluctance by console giants to enter a market plagued by notoriously high levels of piracy.





Some key features have been put back into the PSX…

…though we still don't have a UK release date.



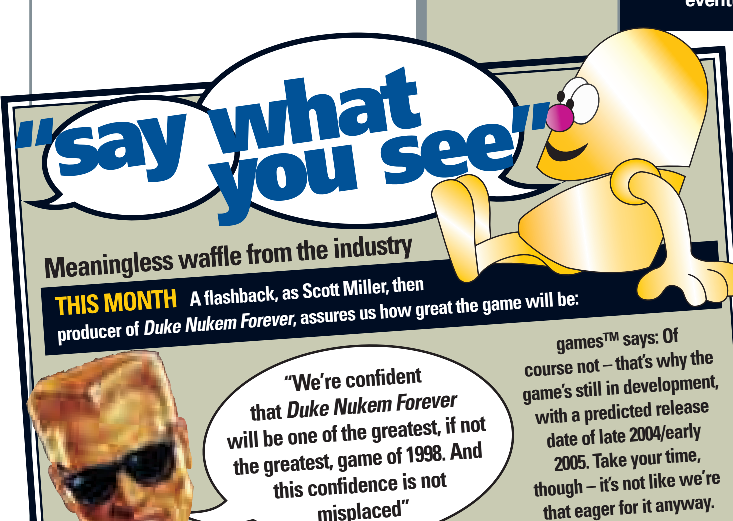
A LITTLE XTRA FOR THE PSX?

SONY'S PSX IS FINALLY OUT, WITH MORE TO COME

We were less than impressed with Sony's recent butchering of the PSX, but improvements for the 'extraordinary' machine are apparently on the way. The Japanese electronics giant has revealed that MP3 playback and the support of all major image formats will be reinstated to the multimedia entertainment system early this year via an internet update. There's no news on the other missing abilities, but seeing as how Sony has also announced additional features that were not even in the original specifications, we're hopeful that they'll eventually be added.

In order to get the PSX into Japanese stores before Christmas, Sony removed several key features from the machine, including the ability to read CD-R discs and record on DVDR+W. However, with a Sony spokesperson stating that "There's still no official release date yet" for the machine in the UK, we should hopefully receive the machine as it was originally intended.

Despite the drastic cuts that Sony inflicted on the PSX in Japan, the enthusiasm of Japanese consumers has not been dampened, with eager gamers forming long queues to get their hands on the machine since its launch.



"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH A flashback, as Scott Miller, then producer of *Duke Nukem Forever*, assures us how great the game will be:

"We're confident that *Duke Nukem Forever* will be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, game of 1998. And this confidence is not misplaced"

games™ says: Of course not – that's why the game's still in development, with a predicted release date of late 2004/early 2005. Take your time, though – it's not like we're that eager for it anyway.

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!

BLACK ISLE IS LATEST INDUSTRY CASUALTY

RPG BOWS OUT

Successful RPG developer Black Isle Studios is no more. Despite creating a number of critically acclaimed hits including *Planescape: Torment*, *Fallout* and *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II*, the studio was effectively closed when publisher Interplay laid off around 14 staff.

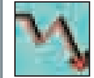
Problems began for Black Isle Studios and Interplay earlier last year when Interplay lost the *Baldur's Gate* PC licence to Atari, although it retained its console licence. Black Isle was around nine months from completing *Baldur's Gate III* when the change in licence forced it to quit the project.

"Today was my last day at Black Isle Studios, as it was for my whole team," said Black Isle's Damien Foletto on a forum in December. "I don't know where I'll end up, but I do know that we were all avid gamers and wanted to make the PC games that not only we wanted to play, but also the fans wanted."

Though we're likely to see *Baldur's Gate* on consoles, this is sad news for PC owners.

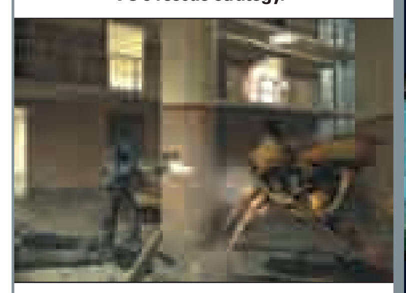


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DRASTIC ACTION

Vivendi Universal Games is reported to be undergoing a massive restructuring programme in a desperate attempt to ensure its financial performance in 2004 improves on the dismal figures posted last year. After suffering an operating loss of €58 million in the third quarter of 2003, the company's games division is bidding to revive both shareholder confidence and interest from potential buyers who are unlikely to be tempted by its alleged $1 billion asking price. Around 70 cost-cutting job losses and the eventual release of assured hit *Half-Life 2* could prove key to VU's rescue strategy.



Mobile game of the month

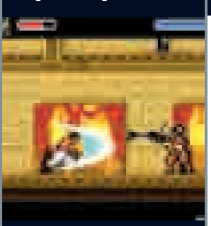
PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME

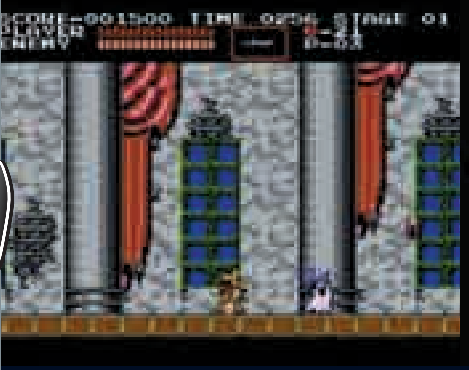
As much as we enjoyed the first *Prince Of Persia* mobile game, Gameloft's *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* raises the bar even further and perfectly complements its fancy 128-bit peers.

Considering the clunkiness of most mobile keypads, the Prince controls extremely easily and you'll soon be leaping around the well-detailed levels to your heart's content. While the game is incredibly easy to complete, the solid gameplay constantly pulls you back so that you can witness just how much effort has gone into this classy little title.



■ A prince of Persia, and a king of mobile games.





KONAMI CLASSIC GOES MOBILE

ANOTHER BIG-NAME DEVELOPER JUMPS ON THE MOBILE BANDWAGON

Konami of Europe has become the latest developer to enter the mobile gaming market, with the release of three new games based on classic franchises. Gamers on the move will be able to enjoy the retro thrills of *Frogger*, blast away in *Gradius* or take part in some classic platforming action courtesy of *Castlevania*.

All three games should be available by the time you read this and Konami is promising more titles throughout 2004. Gamers in the US and Japan are already enjoying a selection of Konami classics on their mobile phones and we feel its decision to target Europe is well timed.

The company has entered into a content partnership with Vodafone and the aim is to release the first three titles in 13 European countries, including the UK. With the likes of Electronic Arts, Square Enix and Nokia already in the market, we're certain that 2004 will be the year when mobile gaming really takes off.

SQUARE SHOT

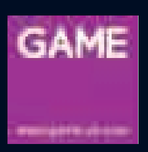
SQUARE ENIX GOES MOBILE BUT JAPAN MUST WAIT

After announcing its intentions to move into the mobile games industry, Square Enix has released its first phone-based title. But gamers hoping for some *Final Fantasy* goodness will be disappointed, as the game – *Brave Shot* – is a vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up. Fortunately, it's a slick title with some impressive visuals (for a mobile phone game, of course) and some suitably beefy bosses.

Perhaps the biggest surprise, though, is that *Brave Shot* is the first Square Enix title to be released in the US before Japan. It's available on the Verizon Wireless 'Get It Now' service. Sadly, there's no news yet of *Brave Shot* appearing in the UK, but we're expecting to see it sooner rather than later.

Yoichi Wada, president of Square Enix, is confident that the company can successfully expand into mobile gaming. "The mobile gaming market presents an enormous opportunity for growth and we're planning on launching several titles over the next year," he revealed. Let's just hope the firm's next release is *Einhander*…

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. And with the January sales drawing to a close, you'll be able to keep on saving money. Bonus.



Subject to the terms and conditions listed below:
1. Offer only valid on redemption of this voucher in store, which cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or voucher.
2. Voucher is redeemable at any GAME store in the UK and Eire.
3. This voucher has a cash value of 0.00001p and is non-recoverable.
4. This voucher is redeemable against software and accessories priced £29.99 (€44.99) or more only, excludes hardware.
5. Only one voucher may be used per product and transaction.
6. This voucher cannot be redeemed against a pre-owned purchase.
7. This offer may be withdrawn any any time without prior notice.
8. In Eire, €4 off a spend of €44.99 or more.
9. Voucher valid until 25 February 2004.



Any game priced £29.99 or more



"IT TAKES A TEAM TO MAKE A GAME AND WE HAD SOME INCREDIBLY ROUGH TIMES MAKING IT. IT'S A REAL BLOODY TESTAMENT TO HUMAN ENDURANCE I THINK"

TOBY GARD, CONFOUNDING FACTOR

CONFOUNDING FACTOR

TOBY GARD

How do you follow up one of the most influential games of all time? If you're Toby Gard – the creator of Lara Croft – you ditch the broad for a swarthy captain, swap Lara's trusty pistols for a sabre and take off to the high seas in search of a brand new adventure. Of course, all journeys need to start somewhere and Gard's began 11 years ago when he was just 20. He joined Core Design and worked as chief cave painter on the inadequate *BC Racers*; before long, though, he'd pitched the idea of *Tomb Raider* to Core's head brass and was soon undertaking a massive new task. "I worked on many aspects of *Tomb Raider*," he says. "I animated Lara and most of the baddies, built a couple of the levels, made the in-game cut-scenes, co-wrote the story, storyboarded the FMV – I even animated a couple of them. In addition, I created the menu graphics, marketing materials, intro screens and created game-flow documents for the level artists. I was a very busy boy."

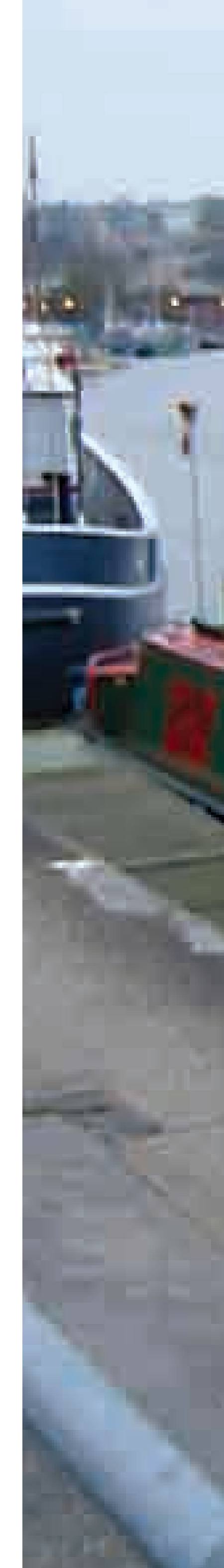
After leaving Lara and Core Design, which went on to create a rapidly tiring string of sequels, Gard moved to Bristol and set up Confounding Factor. Once established, the firm's goal seemed simple – create a title that exceeded *Tomb Raider* in every way. Completing this task, however, created its own set of problems; Gard hadn't realised just how big his new creation would grow. "*Galleon* took so long because it was simply too ambitious for such a small group of people," he explains. "Plus it was pretty badly organised; both of which are my fault. Everyone working at Confounding Factor sacrificed a lot of time to complete it. It takes a team to make a game and we had some incredibly rough times making it. It's a real bloody testament to human endurance I think. Still, I'll know better next time."

One thing that has dogged *Galleon* is its constantly changing platform; when it was first announced it was a PC and Dreamcast title, but it's now appearing on Microsoft's Xbox. "We pushed the Xbox version ahead of the other versions [PS2 and GameCube] because it's the most complete," says Gard. "We really need to get the game out now and see what people really think about it. There have been enough delays already."

It's when you finally see *Galleon* in motion that you realise where all the time and hard work has gone. Rhama and his companions are superbly animated and interact fully with their various environments, and it's this lifelike animation that Gard is hoping will be one of the game's key successes. "*Galleon*'s most cunning technical trick is the animation system," Gard proudly reveals. "We're modelling the movement in a very realistic way – people actually plant their feet on the ground, shift their weight around, get thrown off objects that change velocity too fast and slide around on slippery surfaces." Of course, all of this hardly seems new but it's *Galleon*'s approach to the subject that Gard hopes will prove the turning point. "A real person can walk over complicated terrain because they know where to put their feet by looking ahead. That anticipation is really what makes people move like real people, and its absence is what makes game characters move like stiff automatons. We've taken these principles and allowed *Galleon*'s characters to properly move around the game environments; what you see is what you get, and the solidity and definition of movement done that way just looks really nice."

As technically impressive as *Galleon* may be (it pays to see it in motion) it's important to remember that seven years is a very long time in the games industry. While *Galleon* might have seemed incredibly fresh when it was first revealed, a lot of water has passed under the bridge, and with it a host of accomplished titles. "*Ico* was a sad day for us," reflects Gard. "Well, in retrospect it was also a happy day because it was such a great game. Even though it had a secondary character system similar to *Galleon*'s, at least we had something good to play over that weekend to cheer us up. Apart from that, though, only *Prince Of Persia* gave us a scare. Luckily, on a proper play through it actually plays very differently, so I still feel *Galleon* has no direct competitors."

Indeed, Gard feels that the industry is becoming saturated with licences and sequels and that we'll have to start looking very hard for gems like the titles he's already mentioned. Though this will help *Galleon* stand out, Gard doesn't approve. "It's all moving to giant teams and conservative projects that rely on market research rather than inspiration and passion for their concept," he laments. "That's how you get your game noticed these days it seems – you buy a licence for it. Damn, I sound bitter."





LIKE THE LEGENDARY 'DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM', TOBY GARD'S FOLLOW-UP TO TOMB RAIDER IS TAKING ITS SWEET TIME. BUT NOW THAT GALLEON'S RELEASE IS IMMINENT, WE FIND OUT JUST WHY IT'S TAKEN SEVEN YEARS TO MAKE ONE GAME

THE FOURTH PLACE

CONSOLE MARKETING MEN WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE ONLINE GAMING IS THE FUTURE. SO WHAT DOES LATECOMER SONY HAVE TO OFFER OVER THE XBOX?

Xbox Live may be hogging the online console limelight, but it's not the only way to take on the world – why, even the GameCube has gone online (though not officially). So it's no surprise that Sony's online adventure is now in full swing. Bizarrely, promotion for the service has been minimal, which is doubly confusing when every other television advert seems to be for Live.

But while PS2 Online is still in its infancy over here, the US appears to be going crazy for the service – recent figures suggest that combined players of *SOCOM* and *Madden* outnumber Xbox Live subscribers. We can only assume that Sony is awaiting the release of its big game for 2004 before going to town with the ads; *Gran Turismo 4* will no doubt be the title on which its hopes of beating Microsoft will rest. In the meantime, what delights will make us grab a Network Adaptor?

CURRENT TITLES

EverQuest Online Adventures

DON'T KEEP THE NICE DWARVES AND ELVES WAITING

You have to respect SOE for even entertaining the notion of porting such a PC-oriented title as *EverQuest* to less powerful and less practical hardware. And it's a valiant effort, but one that doesn't quite work. The visual and sonic sacrifices that have been made to keep the game running relatively smoothly really damage the feel and atmosphere – it's hard to get drawn into such a scrappy and synthetic world. This proves especially true when you realise that much of the game involves trudging across plains and fighting the same enemies ad infinitum in order to grind your way through the levels. This monotony ultimately ruins *Online Adventures*, with the dumbed-down combat and tasks getting very old, very quickly. And don't forget that you're asked to pay a subscription fee for the privilege of guiding your avatar around the expansive game world. For its flaws, it's easy to see how people could become addicted, even though from a technical standpoint this is a sub-par title.

VERDICT 4/10
THE NOVELTY IS DISAPPOINTINGLY FLEETING



"THE VISUAL AND SONIC SACRIFICES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE TO KEEP THE GAME RUNNING RELATIVELY SMOOTHLY REALLY DAMAGE THE FEEL AND ATMOSPHERE"

Tony Hawk's Underground

READY TO BUST OUT SOME GLOBAL COMBOS?

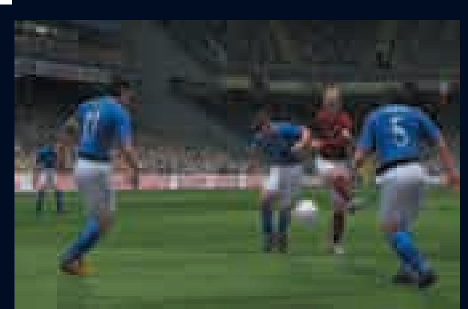
With so much criticism levelled at *Underground*'s 'faux-edgy' style, some people have failed to look past the front end to find the finest extreme-sports engine produced so far. Sadly, the increased combo potential doesn't translate to the online experience too well – the fact that you're tricking for much longer gives opponents more time to knock you down. Larger levels go some way to rectifying this, but depending on the mode you're in you should always consider the greed/score balance. Game modes are the usual fare, but it seems the more new modes are thrown into the mix the less reliant on skill they become. We always returned to old favourites rather than King Of The Hill and suchlike, though we'll admit to dabbling in the more gimmicky modes from time to time – there's only so long you can maintain multi-million point combos, after all. *THUG*'s online and offline experiences are pretty similar – flawed in a few excusable areas but still scarily enjoyable.

"IT SEEMS THAT THE MORE NEW MODES ARE THROWN INTO THE MIX THE LESS RELIANT ON SKILL THEY TEND TO BECOME"

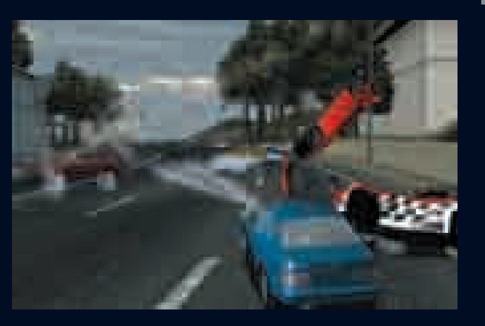
VERDICT 7/10
GREAT FUN BUT JUST MORE OF THE SAME



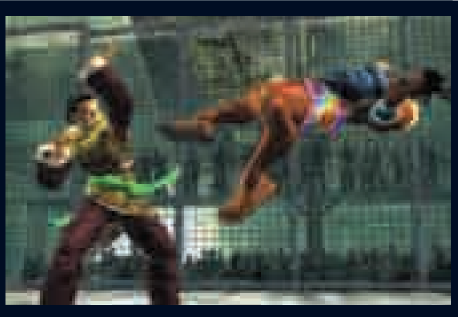
TAKE ON ME THE FRANCHISES WE'D MOST LIKE TO SEE GO GLOBAL



If there's any truth in the rumours that Japan's upcoming *Winning Eleven 7 Final Evolution* will feature online play as was originally hoped, you can rest assured that its localised sister series, *Pro Evolution Soccer*, will also take to the world stage. You'll never need to leave the house again…



With PS2 Online racing fans currently restricted to just *Need For Speed Underground* for a high-speed fix, Criterion's *Burnout 2* would be arguably the best-suited title for online play. Screaming through cities and countryside alike alongside drivers the world over is a marvellous prospect, no?



Another game of precision and timing, it would take some doing but we'd love to see SEGA's seminal *Virtua Fighter* series go online at some point. Just think how many people around the world are playing *VF4 Evo* religiously and are keen to show you how good you really are. Start practising now just in case.

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

A SELECT FEW TITLES PUSH THE BOUNDARIES, BUT HERE'S WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF…

ONLINE RANKINGS

■ It's only a small element, but the sense of overwhelming satisfaction that comes from seeing your pseudonym among the top flight makes it all worthwhile. By offering prizes, plenty of stats and changing events regularly, a game can easily become the centre of an online community, which can only be good for its lasting appeal.

CO-OPERATIVE PLAY

■ While we understand the technological difficulty of coding co-operative online play, it's a feature that really can make a game stand out from the crowd. As such, we look forward to seeing how *Biohazard Outbreak, Monster Hunter* and the like will fare over the coming months – the future could well be working together.

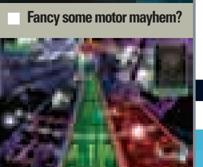
TOURNAMENTS

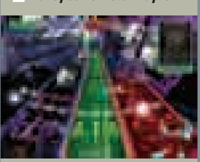
■ Particularly with online sports games, wouldn't it be great to have a cup (or even a league) going on where every team involved is a player somewhere in the world? A very real possibility and one we hope comes to fruition in a big way with the next bout of online sporting titles.

PROMOTION

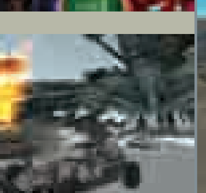
■ This isn't really a feature to improve online play, but PS2 Online seriously needs some promotional backing if it's to compete with Xbox Live. With online exclusives like *Tony Hawk's Underground, Hardware* and *Amplitude*, it's not as though the quality games aren't there…

With PS2 Online you can shoot strangers at will…





Fancy some motor mayhem?





Explosions and big machines – just what we like.

MORE TITLES IN STORES NOW

Hardware Online Arena

IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF THE GUN…

Based on the simplest of concepts – drive tank, blow up other tanks – there's very little room for error and, fortunately, *Hardware*'s execution is good enough to hold your attention. The repetitive and limiting nature of the game's tasks means that replay value is far from endless but this game, more than any other on PS2 Online, lends itself to 'little and often' play. With only the disappointing *Twisted Metal Black* offering similar network shenanigans, and boasting a reduced price to encourage sales, *Hardware* is definitely worth a look for those seeking something a little different from an online experience.

VERDICT 7/10
BASIC BUT STRANGELY ENJOYABLE NONETHELESS



XIII

AMNESIA? DON'T WORRY – JUST GO AND KILL A FEW PEOPLE

We expected big things of *XIII*. Too big, perhaps, which would explain why we were so disappointed with what was basically a by-the-numbers shooter with rather suspect AI.

So take out the artificial unintelligence, replace it with human players and you're all set for great things, right? Wrong. Try as we might to love this sumptuous example of the genre, there's just nothing particularly interesting or unique that keeps you playing. The various game modes should keep you occupied for at least as long as it takes to try them all out, but after that it probably won't be too long until this goes back on the shelf.

VERDICT 5/10
THE GLORIOUS STYLE HIDES MUNDANE NET PLAY

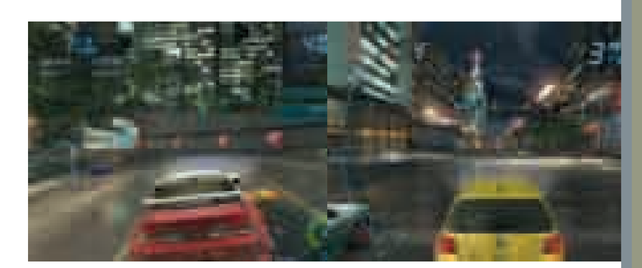


Need For Speed Underground

ATTRACTING MORE BOY RACERS THAN FASTCAR.COM

Like it or not, there's a little street spirit in all of us, and much as many of us try to hide it there's a strange kind of satisfaction to be found in assembling the perfect ride. While offline play may have left us a little cold, taking your gaudy wheels online actually gives the main game a greater feeling of purpose – something to work towards. Racing is the usual fare and the lack of chat support makes races slightly sterile (although this is probably a blessing given the game's clientele and their crazy vocabularies), but it's ultimately the online structure, rankings and game modes that make this worth a look.

VERDICT 6/10
GREAT IMPLEMENTATION, AVERAGE RACING



NHL 2004

EA'S COLLABORATION WITH SONY COMES GOOD

As regular players of the EA hockey franchise, we'd say the 2003 edition was arguably the worst yet, so the release of the latest update to put right former misdeeds was something of a godsend, albeit a predictable one. Aside from the offline improvements, the latest batch of EA Sports games have all featured PS2-exclusive online play and it's safe to say that this is every bit as good as any among them. Limited to just two silent players, games play out just like your opponent was in the room (only without the shouting… well, they can't hear you, at least) which, thanks to the solid gameplay, is no bad thing at all.

VERDICT 7/10
ONE-ON-ONE ACTION WITH EA'S TRADEMARK SHEEN



Roll up, roll up

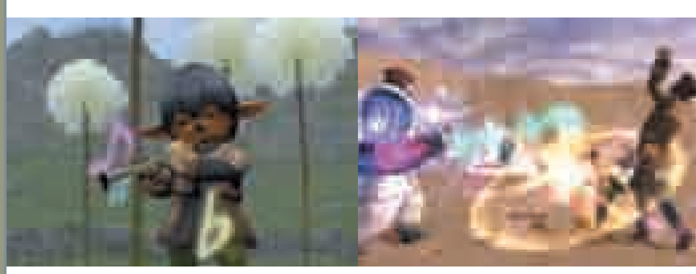
GATHER ROUND FOR THIS YEAR'S FORTHCOMING ONLINE ATTRACTIONS…

Final Fantasy XI

GEEKS OF THE WORLD UNITE AND GO FORTH

Square Enix's PC foray into the realm of the MMORPG is due for a PS2 release this year. As with similar titles, the game benefits from a mouse/keyboard set-up, so controls could suffer on the console. The brand alone should sell this to RPG fans, but Square Enix can't afford to get lazy with its flagship franchise.

"THE BRAND ALONE SHOULD SELL THIS TO RPG FANS, BUT SQUARE ENIX CAN'T GET LAZY WITH ITS FRANCHISE"

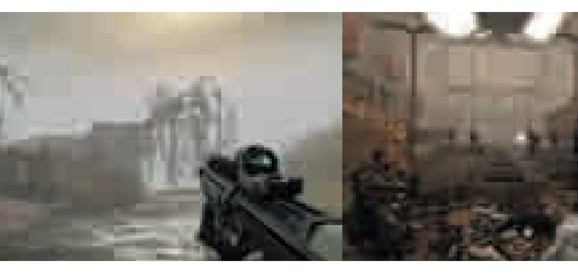


Killzone

SONY'S GREAT HOPE FOR 2004

After the disappointing *MOH: Rising Sun* and *Fire Warrior*, gamers wishing to shoot each other have to wait for the 'next big thing'. From a Sony standpoint, this year's hopes ride with *Killzone*; and if it delivers on its lofty promises, PS2 owners (especially those equipped to go online) will be in for quite a ride.

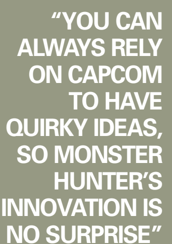
"IF KILLZONE DELIVERS ON ITS LOFTY PROMISES THEN PS2 OWNERS ARE IN FOR QUITE A RIDE LATER THIS YEAR"



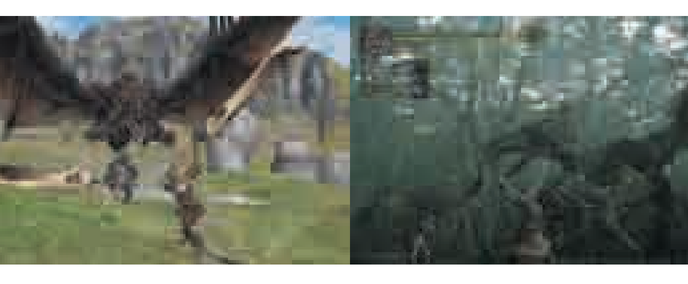
Monster Hunter

PERHAPS WE SHOULD TELL THEM TO LET SLEEPING DRAGONS LIE…

You can always rely on Capcom to come up with a quirky idea, so *Monster Hunter*'s promised innovation and scope isn't a surprise. Players party up and go forth in search of massive creatures, setting traps and using resources from fallen beasts to improve equipment and restore health. Definitely one to watch.



"YOU CAN ALWAYS RELY ON CAPCOM TO HAVE QUIRKY IDEAS, SO MONSTER HUNTER'S INNOVATION IS NO SURPRISE"





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"THE WINTER COMES DOWN HARD, WITH WEE-FREEZING INTENSITY, INADVISABLE TO BE OUTSIDE; A STATE OF AFFAIRS HEAVILY

Is there a more perfect time of year to play videogames than wintertime? I submit that there is not. There's just something delightfully cosy about a foot of snow on the ground, as there is at this moment, with more on the way, and all sorts of relaxed rules about eating chocolate during the day, with access to warm, comfortable seating and enchanting software to explore. Said a friend of mine during a lengthy discussion on the merits of *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. "The loading isn't even that bad if you play with a nice cup of cocoa."

One of the reasons we moved to the US is because it has proper weather. Britain could be described as having five seasons. The fifth, whose existence is sinisterly omitted from all contemporary meteorological texts, is called Indeterminate Grey and reigns for up to 42 weeks of the British calendar. America has a place like that too, but they ran a border round it, installed the world's most feared tech firm and clearly labelled it on the map – 'Seattle' – so we'd all know to steer clear. Out here in the north east we get the lot, and this is for the most part a greatly satisfactory arrangement. A fresh, invigorating spring; a summer that will bubble the paint on your car; famously the world's most spectacular autumn, populated by trees ablaze with every colour from crimson to canary; then a very clearly defined, dependable, storybook winter – my favourite of all.

Like all indulgences, it's rife with risk. The winter comes down hard, with wee-freezing intensity, and for many reasons it's inadvisable to be outside; a state of affairs heavily conducive to electronic entertainment. "Last winter," reads a letter sent to me from the United States Postal Service, "over 10,000 of your friendly letter carriers were injured attempting to deliver mail. Many of these injuries were directly related to slipping and falling on ice and snow." As a worrier, this statistic immediately frightens me off any active involvement with my front steps, such as walking on them, whereas I suppose it was meant to stir concern for the safety of local mailpersons. No icy stairs inside, just joypads, surround sound and pie, at a pleasantly stuffy 70 degrees.

If you make it out of the house it's dangerous to be around people, because in winter people are sick. Following an ill-advised excursion to a lab party I have contracted a fierce seasonal strain of the deadly SARS virus. This marks the third time I've caught SARS in as many months. Luckily, Mrs Shape has been spared, eerily suffering only a standard cold on all three occasions. But being sick means you can play games all day, in your shorts, with sticky-up bed hair, and nobody can say shit. These are ideal *Dark Cloud 2* conditions. Another score for winter.

■ Christmas may be over but those long winter nights refuse to go away. Which is a good thing…



AND FOR MANY REASONS IT'S CONDUCIVE TO PLAYING GAMES"

If you're not frightened indoors by steps, sidewalks or people, you will be by the road. It's simply madness. Two elements to consider: 1) US tyres are made out of old tennis shoes; 2) people drive like they're in the movies. Add some fresh snow or black ice and what plays out is a most balletic display of strafing, careening and pirouetting vehicles, evoking thoughts of hippos on ice. Everywhere you go, some hulking pickup is sailing smoothly over the cambered street in a direction very much inconsistent with the orientation of its wheels – if you were watching this on tape, it would sync beautifully with Johann Strauss Jr's *Blue Danube* waltz. As it unfolds before your eyes in real life, though, there's only one soundtrack: a distant guttural howl that you gradually become aware is you, screaming, waiting for one of these monsters to crush you.

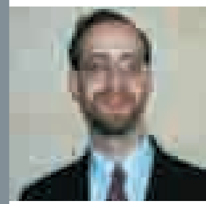
So it's not difficult to see why, in conjunction with the best winter release schedule in recent memory, I will mostly be sitting indoors playing videogames until the sweet chirp of new chicks is again in the air. Those who know me may say: right, but hey, you're always sitting indoors playing videogames anyway. To them I say: true, but for these three months I'm enjoying it that little bit more. Then I say: quit hogging the Oreos and let's see if you can win at least one match of *Smash Court* – I'll put on some cocoa.

Many thanks



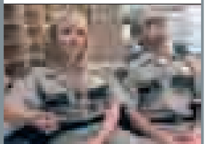
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Open University



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Reno 911



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

RUSTY SCUPPER

The equivalent, if one can exist, to Harry Ramsden's in Britain. Hearty seafood served by the shoreline, but without the pretence that there's anything posh about fish and chips.





US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	True Crime: Streets Of LA	Activision	Multi
2	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	Atari	PS2
3	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Multi
4	Max Payne 2	Rockstar	Multi
5	Manhunt	Rockstar	PS2
6	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	GC
7	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	EA	Multi
8	WWE Smackdown! Here Comes The Pain	THQ	PS2
9	Madden NFL 2004	EA Sports	Multi
10	The Simpsons: Hit And Run	Vivendi	Multi

(Updated 7/1/04)

True Crime

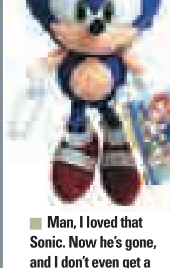
Dragon Ball Z

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"WE FOUND A LITTLE PLUSH SONIC WRAPPED IN CRINKLY PLASTIC. HIS STUFFED, HIS WHITE EYES WERE GREY WITH DUST, HE WAS BRAND



Man, I loved that Sonic. Now he's gone, and I don't even get a consolation prize.

When I arrived home from the Nobuo Uematsu and The Black Mages *Final Fantasy* rock concert at Kanagawa University last month, I was greeted by my neighbourly Frenchman. He greeted me in a somewhat confused manner. "Hey, your friend just left." Which friend? "A girl – short, black hair, big head, speaks no English." This was not enough information. "She was dressed in death-metal black and Barbie pink," he went on. Oh hell, I realised, he's talking about Jun-chan, my personal stalker. She must have had the day off from work. "What did she… do?" I asked. "She sat around, watched TV with me, played *Neverwinter Nights* on your computer, slept." Slept? Where? "In your bed." I ran upstairs and dug into my bed. I turned the futon pads. My Xbox pillow from Tokyo Game Show was still intact, as was my old blue blanket. Nothing was missing except… my plush Sonic the Hedgehog from1993.

I fell into a depression for what must have been four days. I couldn't eat my convenience-store risotto soup. I couldn't sleep. And I sure as hell couldn't just call up Jun-chan and tell her to give me my damned Sonic back. That would have been too much trouble. At few weeks later, I told a friend of mine about the situation and she took pity. She asked if there was anything she could do to help. We were in Ueno at the time, so we walked down to Akihabara and stepped into a couple of those giant stores that sell everything related to videogames. At the Yamagiwa Soft on Showa Avenue she held up plush after plush. A 'life-size' Moogle doll just like the one Lulu carries in *Final Fantasy X*. A plush Chocobo and a Tonberry. A shoddily stitched Parappa. None of these would do – I wanted Sonic.

At another store we found a little plush Sonic wrapped in crinkly plastic. His spines were individually stuffed, his white eyes were greyed with dust – he was brand new, yet looked anciently old. And he was half the size of my Sonic, the original stuffed Sonic. Similarly tired-looking Tails and Knuckles also existed in that same shop. We wound up at AsoBitCity, Akihabara's capital for new, expensive stuff, where a three-year-old child was having his picture taken in front of a Mario statue; arguably the best Mario statue in the world, he's plastic and very clean. On that day, a styrofoam Mr. Saturn from *Earthbound* stood at Mario's feet, next to a sign that said "It's okay to take pictures here". The sign in the front of the store says "No food or drinks, or photography" – the photography part is in English only.

"My Sonic was perfect," I said. "I got him in America and he was better than the stuff here. Can you believe that?" My friend yawned. "That's the true test of an icon," she said. "Even up-close it's perfect and clean and well-rounded."

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON FIFTEEN: PLUSH TOY GREED

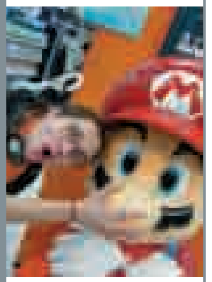
KAWAII! SUGOI KAWAII! SHINJIRARENAI, KORE!	This is cute! It's so cute! Oh my god I can't BELIEVE THIS!
Mou ikko kaou kana…	Maybe I should get another…
Are mo hoshii. Kore mo hoshii. Motto hoshii. Motto motto hoshii!	I want that. I want this. I want more. I want more and more!
Subete no kimitachi no kichi ga CATS wa itadaita.	CATS have partaken of all your territories (or, uh, 'All your base are belong to us'…).

SPINES WERE INDIVIDUALLY NEW YET LOOKED ANCIENT"

We were downstairs by now, looking at a display of stuffed Slime monsters from the new *Slime Morimori Dragon Quest* for Game Boy Advance. Two months previously at the Tokyo Game Show I'd been quite violently denied a plush Slime by a Squaresoft PR employee. These Slimes at AsoBitCity – I think they might have been the same ones from TGS. The price-tags even bore the same weathering. "Didn't you want one of these a while back?" my friend asked me. "Yeah," I told her, holding up the Slime and squeezing it. It was perfect, simple, smooth, big, blue, cute and only ¥1,500. "Come on, I'll buy you one." We took it up to the register. "Oh! I'm sorry!" the guy screamed before we could put the thing down. Oh? "Those aren't for sale," he told us, catching his breath. He then reached out his hands and took the Slime from my friend. The guy ran back to put the Slime in its place in the display. My friend and I blinked in unison. I then asked her if, maybe, she couldn't just buy me dinner instead. She said that sounded like a good idea.

Kind regards





You wouldn't believe how smooth this Mario statue's nose is. My god…

TINY THINGS: WITHIN TINY THINGS

On that day of disappointment we found ourselves at AsoBitCity's wall of capsule toy machines. For the measly sum of ¥200 I could get a tiny plastic figure of Mega Man. I gritted my teeth at the suggestion – what sort of a replacement could that ever be for a cherished Sonic?

We made our way upward past a floor of animated pornography and to the top, the 'event area' where plastic statuettes of Gundams were being scrutinised under glass by several discerning collectors while less discerning citizens settled in to play the new Gundam game on a nearby PS2. I looked over a few Gundams and shook my head.

"I remember, years ago, seeing something in a magazine about these little *Street Fighter II* figures you could get at Japanese capsule machines," I told my friend. "I remember thinking: 'Dude, it'd be so awesome to live in Japan'. Now that I'm here I'm like: 'These things are so small and cheap and flimsy'."

"And the Colonel Sanders statues at Kentucky Fried Chicken are so… dirty," my friend added. "That's just how things are up-close."

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Rockman EXE 4 Tournament	Capcom	GBA
2	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	GC
3	Full Metal Alchemist	Square Enix	PS2
4	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	GC
5	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	GC
6	Momotaro Dentetsu 12	Hudson	PS2
7	Taiko No Tatsujin: 3rd Generation	Namco	PS2
8	One Piece Grand Battle 3	Bandai	PS2
9	Gold Gashbell	Banpresto	GBA
10	Gran Turismo 4: Prologue	SCE	PS2

(Updated 28/12/03,)



Mario Party 5

Full Metal Alchemist

NOT HAPPY WITH BEING THE GAME DESIGNER FOR THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL XBOX TITLE RAINBOW SIX 3, UBISOFT'S MAXIME BELAND IS NOW HARD AT WORK ON THE PLAYSTATION2 VERSION. NO REST FOR THE, ER, TALENTED, EH?



"I HOPE THAT IN FUTURE WE'RE GOING TO SEE EVEN MORE WAYS THAT THE GAMER CAN INTERACT, OTHER THAN WITH A SIMPLE PAD"

MAXIME BELAND, GAME DESIGNER, UBISOFT

UBISOFT

MAXIME BELAND

Talk to ten developers about how they got into the industry and you come away with ten different explanations. Some started out writing scripts for TV and ended up doing something a little more 'interactive'. Some were interested in art and wound up creating their masterpieces on a digital canvas. We've met developers who started as journalists, as chefs, as musicians… there are all sorts of paths into the industry, but there are some people whose reasons for being there are far more simple. Take Maxime Beland, for instance, the game designer for Ubisoft who worked on the Xbox version of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3* and is now overseeing work on the PlayStation2 port of the title for Ubisoft Shanghai.

"I'm a guy!" says Beland when asked how and why he got into the industry. "I think every guy wants to play games and eventually make them. I've been playing games since, well, I don't know when. I had all the consoles when I was a kid, and then at some point one of my friends said: 'Hey, this summer Ubisoft is hiring people to play games'. And I was like: 'What? They're going to pay me to play? What is that about?' So I sent in my resumé and did an interview, and they hired me, and that's how it started."

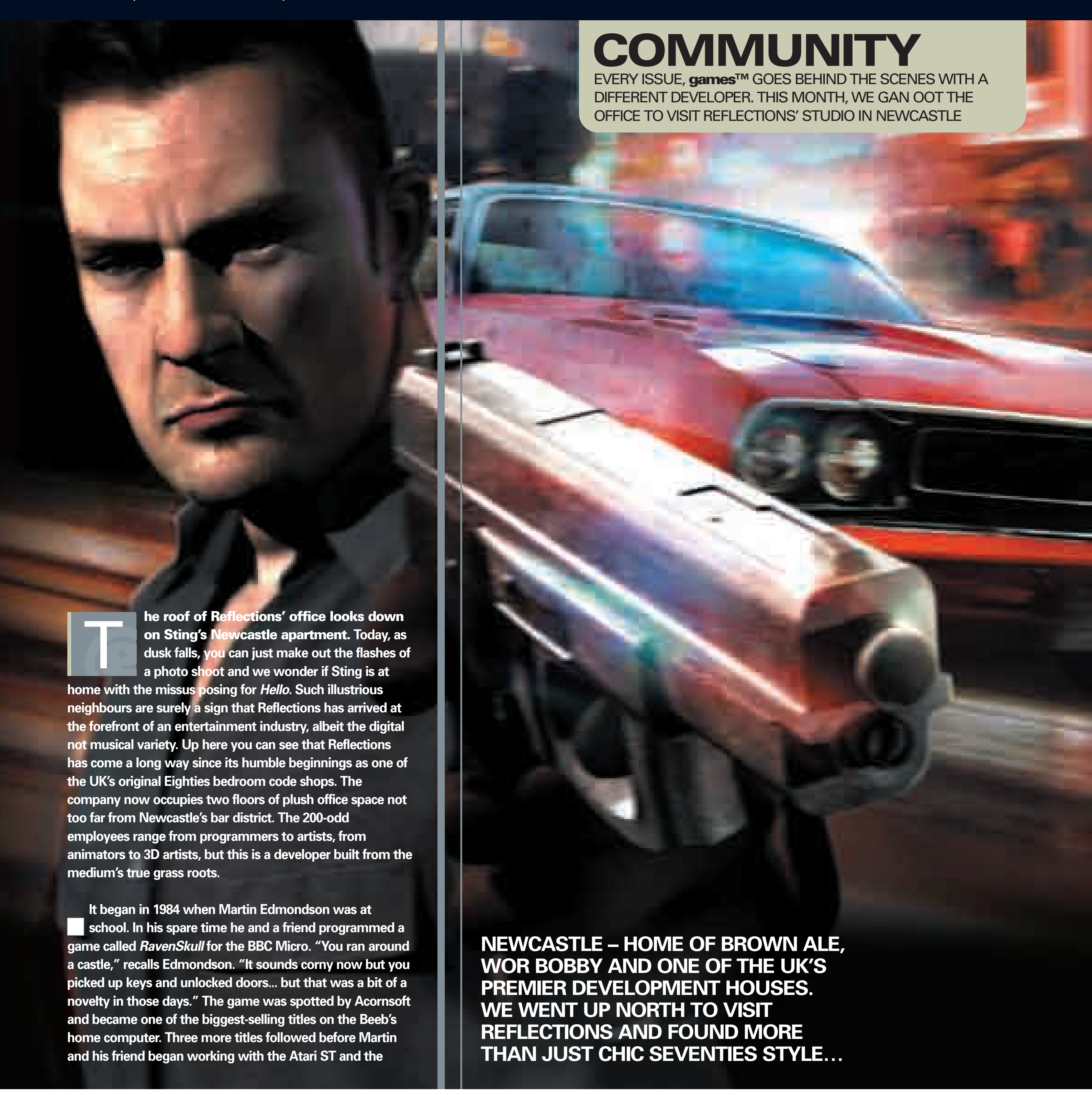
Although *Rainbow Six 3* is being developed in Shanghai, Beland is still based predominantly at Ubisoft Montreal, where, he says, technology makes it possible for him to do his job without the need to travel too much. Technological advances, in fact, are very much on Beland's mind. "I think that right now we're seeing a lot of advances, graphics-wise and technology-wise," he says. "I mean, it's getting better and better, the things we can do with games – the immersion levels that we can achieve with really cool graphics, really cool 3D sound… It's just the whole 'immersion' aspect that's really cool."

But not everything has advanced in quite the way that Beland would like. "The way the player interacts with the game hasn't really evolved that much," he says. "We're still playing with only a gamepad – yeah, there's more buttons, but with the PS2 version of *Rainbow Six 3* we [at Ubisoft] are giving you voice recognition, which is a really cool thing, as it means that the way that you interact with the game changes – it's not only through the gamepad. So I think we're seeing a little change, and I hope that in the future we're going to see even more ways that the gamer can interact, other than with a simple pad."

With his enthusiasm for technological advances, the *Rainbow Six 3* designer seems the perfect person to quiz for his thoughts on the next generation of consoles. Where does he see the technology taking us? "I think we're going to get a lot more power," he says. "Not just graphically – although obviously graphics-wise we're going to be able to push the envelope a lot more – but with the bigger and better processors we're going to have a lot more physics, and far better AI. Those are the two areas at the moment where we have to limit ourselves really, basically because of the processors. I think that simply having more and more processor power will give us a chance to really push the physics and the AI a lot more. And as we get more RAM we're going to be able to build bigger, nicer levels."

So does this mean that Maxime knows what some of the next-gen consoles will be like? "Of course," he smiles broadly. Fantastic, so can you share with us? "Of course not." he smiles again, even more broadly. "That's the little part of my job that I love – I know things that other people don't!" Damn. Okay, well moving on, many feel that the console market in the UK is a two-horse race between Sony and Microsoft. As a developer with his eye on the future, Maxime must have an opinion on Nintendo, and where the company will stand in the next round of the console wars, right? As it turns out, he's a fan. "I love their platform," he says. "I think we can learn so much from their games. If they're not doing so well in some parts of the world, then I think it's a shame. I think all three consoles right now can offer so many different things through their varied catalogues of games. I think it's sad that they're not doing as well as the other two, because I feel that the quality of their games is – the first-party ones at least – stunning. We'll see what happens though, because we could have a new company just pop up that releases a new console which is amazing and takes the world by storm – you just never know."

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 is available now on Xbox, with the PlayStation2 version due to arrive in March.



COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, WE GAN OOT THE OFFICE TO VISIT REFLECTIONS' STUDIO IN NEWCASTLE

REFLECTIONS

NEWCASTLE – HOME OF BROWN ALE, WOR BOBBY AND ONE OF THE UK'S PREMIER DEVELOPMENT HOUSES. WE WENT UP NORTH TO VISIT REFLECTIONS AND FOUND MORE THAN JUST CHIC SEVENTIES STYLE…

The roof of Reflections' office looks down on Sting's Newcastle apartment. Today, as dusk falls, you can just make out the flashes of a photo shoot and we wonder if Sting is at home with the missus posing for *Hello*. Such illustrious neighbours are surely a sign that Reflections has arrived at the forefront of an entertainment industry, albeit the digital not musical variety. Up here you can see that Reflections has come a long way since its humble beginnings as one of the UK's original Eighties bedroom code shops. The company now occupies two floors of plush office space not too far from Newcastle's bar district. The 200-odd employees range from programmers to artists, from animators to 3D artists, but this is a developer built from the medium's true grass roots.

It began in 1984 when Martin Edmondson was at school. In his spare time he and a friend programmed a game called *RavenSkull* for the BBC Micro. "You ran around a castle," recalls Edmondson. "It sounds corny now but you picked up keys and unlocked doors… but that was a bit of a novelty in those days." The game was spotted by Acornsoft and became one of the biggest-selling titles on the Beeb's home computer. Three more titles followed before Martin and his friend began working with the Atari ST and the

There are some 200 people at Reflections, and all have been working on *Driv3r* for two years. That's 864,000 man hours on one game…

"SHADOW OF THE BEAST SOLD AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT ON THE AMIGA BECAUSE IT WAS SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED FOR IT. AT THE TIME THERE WERE EVEN RUMOURS OF PEOPLE BUYING AN AMIGA JUST TO PLAY THE GAME"

Amiga. And that's when *Shadow Of The Beast* happened. Was this the big breakthrough game for Reflections? "I suppose it was the most high-profile one, because a big seller on the BBC didn't necessarily generate a lot of press," says Edmondson. "*Shadow Of The Beast* sold an enormous amount on the Amiga because it was specifically designed for it. Everyone said you'd be mad to write a game for the Amiga, but what happened was that because it made the Atari ST look shit anyone who owned an Amiga bought a copy. At the time there were even rumours of people buying an Amiga just to play *Shadow Of The Beast*."

The next big step for the company was console development, and the choice between the Saturn and the fledgling PlayStation. An easy decision, apparently. "The PlayStation just looked so much more powerful on the specs and you just thought: 'okay, they're the new player but with the power of Sony behind it, it must succeed' so in the end we chose the PlayStation and the game was *Destruction Derby*." Reflections' game was one of the highlights of the PSone's incredibly strong launch. It featured, for the first time, cars that progressively fell apart when they collided with either the scenery or another vehicle. Since then, this kind of technology has become a staple of Reflections' games. "The thing we try and do is realism," says Edmondson. "We don't want to get bogged down in simulation but just make sure that the response of things and the look of things is as realistic as possible." It's a Reflections' philosophy when it comes to game design that everything works according to real-life experience. "Obviously the whole concept [in *Driver*] of driving around and shooting people in the street is a bit of a daft one, but in terms of how it's represented graphically it seems very real."

Driv3r represents the pinnacle of that philosophy. Underpinning the game is a wonderful physics engine which began life as part of *Stuntman* but has been greatly improved upon. *Stuntman* was a huge learning process for Reflections, as Edmondson explains. "Rather than just tinkering around trying to get things to work, we create a game as you go along," he says. "And by the end we realised that there were a thousand and one things that we could have done better –

YOU'RE HISTORY

After nearly 20 years in the industry you'd expect Reflections to have a pretty impressive back catalogue of games. And, as luck would have it, it has…

RAVENSKULL
BBC MICRO, ACORN ELECTRON [1985] ACORNSOFT

Reflections' first game, featuring a castle, an adventurer and some enemies. An innocent age…

STRYKER'S RUN
ACORN ELECTRON [1987] ACORNSOFT

A side-scrolling platformer-cum-shoot-'em-up similar in style to *Impossible Mission*.

BALLISTIX
AMIGA [1989] PSYCLAPSE (PSYGNOSIS)

With some pretty realistic physics, *Ballistix* was a futuristic sports puzzle game.

SHADOW OF THE BEAST
AMIGA [1989] PSYGNOSIS

The game that made Reflections a household name. Incredible parallax scrolling…

SHADOW OF THE BEAST II
AMIGA [1990] PSYGNOSIS

Probably best remembered for its stunning intro sequence that took up an entire 3.5-inch floppy disk.

SHADOW OF THE BEAST III
AMIGA [1992] PSYGNOSIS

The least well-known of the *Beast* games but with even more platforms, switches and puzzles.

BRIAN THE LION
AMIGA [1994] PSYGNOSIS

According to Edmondson, the most advanced game Reflections ever developed for the Amiga.

DESTRUCTION DERBY
PLAYSTATION, PC [1995] PSYGNOSIS

A huge leap in technology both for physics and deformable cars. Top game, too.

DESTRUCTION DERBY 2
PLAYSTATION, PC [1996] PSYGNOSIS

With inclined tracks and arenas, this was a big step forward from the original.

DRIVER
PLAYSTATION, PC [1999] GT INTERACTIVE

Inspired by countless car-chase scenes this was the biggest-selling game of 1999.

DRIVER 2
PLAYSTATION [2000] INFOGRAMES

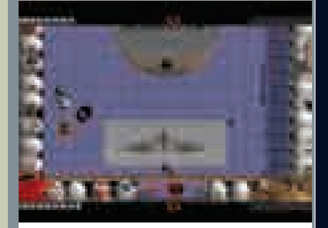
This sequel enabled the player to run around on foot and change cars à la *Grand Theft Auto*.

STUNTMAN
PLAYSTATION2 [2002] INFOGRAMES / ATARI

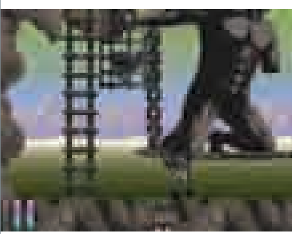
Reflections' first PlayStation2 game, and another film-inspired hit for the company.

DRIV3R
PLAYSTATION2, XBOX [2004] ATARI

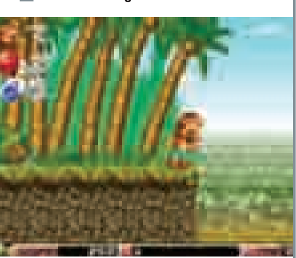
The most anticipated Reflections game yet. Due out in March – can it survive the *GTA* onslaught?



Ballistix on the Amiga – an innovative if under-rated game.



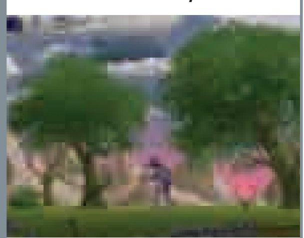
SOTBIII – still good if less well-known.



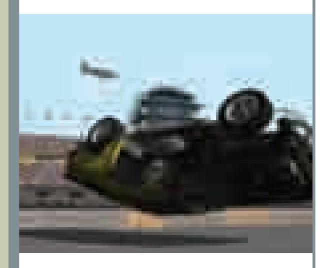
Brian The Lion – a platformer released towards the end of the Amiga's life.



Destruction Derby 2 – a technical wonder but it lacked variety.



Shadow Of The Beast – a classic.



SO REAL, IT'S… HYPER REAL

Each city in *Driv3r* has taken around two years to put together from scratch (they were all worked on simultaneously). The process begins with the research stage, involving the all-important visits to the locations for video shoots and photos, then the use of maps and Reflections' custom-made city-building software. This enables the designers to create street layout, elevations and, finally, to import the building models. While all the major landmarks are built as accurately as the technology allows, parts of the cities are made up of many generic buildings designed in the style of the relevant area.

REAL





especially on a machine like the PlayStation2 where nothing is handed to you on a plate." *Stuntman* was also significant because it gave Reflections an insight into gamers' minds. "The thing we found with *Stuntman* was that people either loved or hated it," Edmondson recalls.

"If you like your action full-on and being told exactly what to do then you'll love it, but if you like your *Vice City* and want to roam around then you're going to hate it. It brought out this amazing difference in people." And what a difference. Some gamers said it was the best game Reflections had ever made, while others claimed that it was not only the company's worst title but the worst game ever…

Finding the right amount of free roaming has been key to the development of *Driv3r*. The basic time-trial nature of the gameplay in *Driver* has been expanded to include more of the on-foot sections that we saw in *Driver 2*, but is this opening-up a response to the success of *Grand Theft Auto III*? "The problem is that *Driver* has been a mission-based game and there's only so many things you can do locked in your car: you can race, you can chase, you can drive carefully, you can drive mad and you start running out of things to do. You've got to have something to link sections together." And that link is Tanner, the expensive-

FACTS AND FIGURES

1 Martin Edmondson is creative director at Reflections. The company was founded in 1984.

2 Martin coded his first programs on the BBC Micro while at high school.

3 He was once voted into twenty-third place in a poll to find 'the most infamous person in the games industry'.

The staff at Reflections have spent the last two years toiling away on *Driv3r*, but it looks like their hard work has been worth it.

Italian-suit-wearing undercover cop hero of the series. In *Driver 2*, Reflections made the brave move of letting Tanner run around, drive any vehicle in the game and fire a gun. This time round he can do more but he's still a small part of the game. "*Driv3r* is a driving game really," Edmondson admits. "We've spent a massive amount of time on the driving elements; the vast majority of your time – 70-75 per cent – will be spent driving rather than walking." So it won't be like *The Getaway*, then? "With that you're changing the nature of the game," says Edmondson, "you're not *Driver* any more. If you start messing around with complex manoeuvres on foot then you're pulling away from the time you have with the driving stuff."

Having found what seems to be a suitable balance between freedom and linearity, Reflections can hopefully look forward to great success with *Driv3r*. And maybe one day they'll get their own *Hello* photo shoot like Sting…

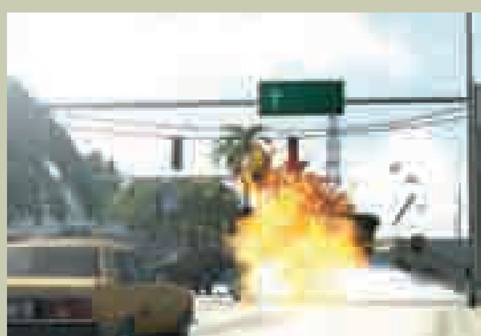
"THE THING WE TRY TO DO IS REALISM. WE DON'T WANT TO GET BOGGED DOWN IN SIMULATION BUT JUST MAKE SURE THE RESPONSE AND LOOK OF THINGS ARE AS REALISTIC AS POSSIBLE"

GO YOUR OWN WAY (ALMOST)

Driv3r seems to be something of a balancing act – allowing the player freedom while still giving him a set direction to follow. But this approach has brought its own kind of development headaches. For example, how far can you go with the freedom and how much do you need to keep gamers reined in? "The first thing is that if you give someone too much freedom someone in the development team has to account for far too many possibilities and situations that the player has to get some reward for," explains Edmondson. "The more little things that we allow the player to do, the more work it is; unless we ignore the rewards, and that's not very satisfying for the player." And, of course, if there are five or six different possibilities for every situation, the player isn't going to see all of them. "That's the other thing, [he'll see] one or two at most if he plays through it again. So there's a balance. If you don't give someone a clear aim then a lot of people will become confused." So now you know…



Reflections is well-known for the destructible cars in its games.



Driv3r features Reflections' usual high standards of graphical realism.



Striking the balance between freedom and linearity has been tough.

RELEASE LISTS



Galleon Xbox We've finally got our hands on elusive preview code.

Rogue Ops Multi Look out Sam and Snake, there's a stealthy new girl in town.

Fire Emblem GBA Everyone's favourite handheld gets more turn-based goodness.

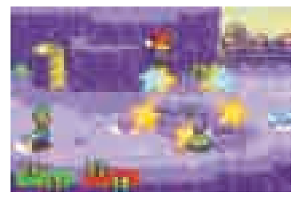


MOST PLAYED

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

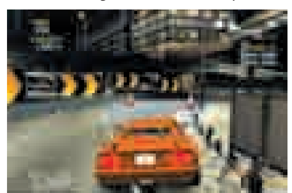
Now that we've got *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* out of our systems, we've been gorging ourselves on this gem. The quest to retrieve Princess Peach's missing voice is classic Nintendo and really shows what the GBA can do when it's not churning out SNES remakes. Next stop, *Fire Emblem*…



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

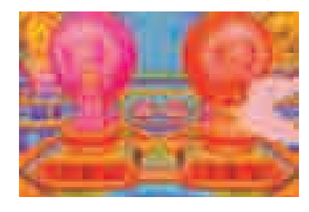
Another month, another dose of Nurburgring heaven. Now that we're au fait with the delights *PGR2* has to offer, you'll find most of us tearing around our favourite track on Live. Sure, some corners are a real bitch, but when the experience is this good, it doesn't really matter.

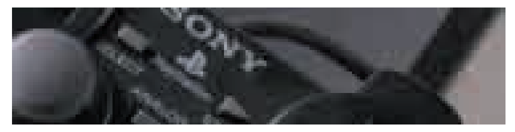


MARIO PARTY 5

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

At last, we found a reason for festive family get-togethers. Improved board sections and plenty of brand new mini-games make this a treat. Next Christmas when your gran is puckering up to give you a big slobbery kiss, stick a GameCube pad in her hand and show her the delights of Mario. After all, Nintendo is bound to release *Mario Party 6*…





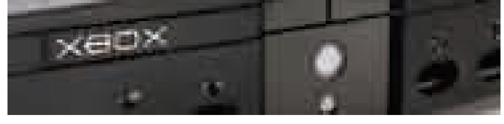
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '04			
30 January	Arc: Twilight Of The Spirits	SCEE	
30 January	Flipnic	Ubisoft	
30 January	NFL Street	EA	
TBC	The X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 4 Xtreme Legends	THQ	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
06 February	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft	
06 February	Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
06 February	R-Type Final	Metro 3D	
06 February	Rogue Ops	Capcom	
06 February	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
06 February	Urban Freestyle Soccer	Acclaim	
13 February	I-Ninja	Sony	
20 February	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
20 February	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
20 February	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
20 February	Whiplash	Eidos	
27 February	Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari	
27 February	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
TBC	Megaman X-7	Capcom	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Spy Hunter 2	Midway	
TBC	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
TBC	Cy Girls	Konami	
TBC	Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	
TBC	Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines	Atari	
TBC	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal	
MARCH '04			
12 March	Tak And The Power Of JuJu	THQ	
26 March	Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Driv3r	Atari	
TBC	Forbidden Siren	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	This Is Football 2004	SCEE	
TBC	SOCOM II: US Navy SEALs	SCEE	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	The Suffering	Midway	
'Q1 04			
TBC	The Getaway 2	SCEE	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Megaman Anniversary Collection	Capcom	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCi	
TBC	Gradius V	Konami	
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	
TBC	Karaoke Stage	Konami	
TBC	Sing	SCEE	
TBC	EyeToy: Sports	SCEE	



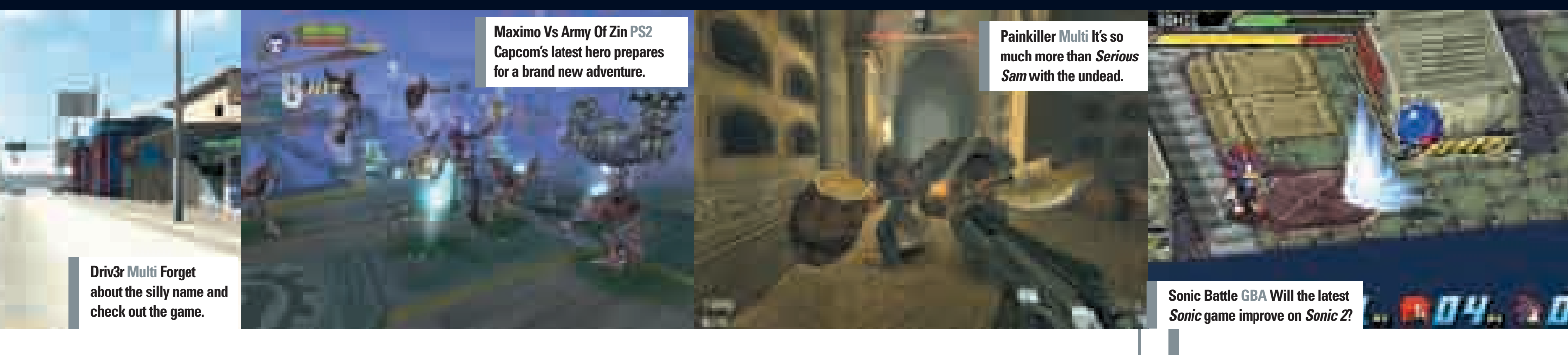
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Conan	TDK	
06 February	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
06 February	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
06 February	XGRA	Acclaim	
20 February	Harvest Moon: It's A Wonderful Life	Nintendo	Wanted
20 February	NFL Street	EA Big	
20 February	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
27 February	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
12 March	Tak And The Power Of JuJu	THQ	
TBC	007 James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
'Q1 04			
TBC	Kirby Air Ride	Nintendo	
TBC	R: Racing Evolution	Namco	
TBC	Wario Ware	Nintendo	
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire	
TBC	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	
TBC	Pokémon Box	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Channel	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Paper Mario	Nintendo	
TBC	Spy Hunter 2	Midway	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
JANUARY '04		
16 January	Mafia	Take 2
30 January	NFL Street	EA



Driv3r Multi Forget about the silly name and check out the game.

Maximo Vs Army Of Zin PS2 Capcom's latest hero prepares for a brand new adventure.

Painkiller Multi It's so much more than *Serious Sam* with the undead.

Sonic Battle GBA Will the latest *Sonic* game improve on *Sonic 2*?

30 January	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
TBC	Conan	TDK	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Acclaim	
06 February	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
06 February	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
06 February	Unreal II: The Awakening	Atari	
13 February	Whiplash	Eidos	
20 February	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
20 February	007 James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	EA	
27 February	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
MARCH '04			
05 March	BC	Microsoft	
26 March	Dead Man's Hand	Atari	
TBC	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Driv3r	Atari	
'Q1 04			
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Halo 2	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	
TBC	Templar: Knights Of The Temple	TDK	
TBC	Rogue Ops	Capcom	
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Fable	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Team SAS	Vivendi	
TBC	True Fantasy Live Online	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Sudeki	Microsoft	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Online	Microsoft	

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '04			
30 January	Sim City 4 Deluxe	EA	
FEBRUARY '04			
06 February	X²: The Threat	Koch	
06 February	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	
20 February	Neighbours From Hell 2	Bigben	
27 February	Soldner: Secret of Wars	JoWood	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown	Capcom	
MARCH '04			
01 March	Savage	Digital Jesters	
19 March	Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault	EA	
19 March	The Sims 2	EA	Wanted
26 March	Battlefield: Vietnam	EA	
'Q1 04			
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Conan	TDK	
TBC	Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	Activision	
TBC	Everquest II	Ubisoft	
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Warhammer Online	SEGA	
TBC	Armed & Dangerous	Activision	
TBC	Painkiller	DreamCatcher	Wanted
TBC	Evil Genius	Vivendi	
TBC	Thief 3	Eidos	
TBC	Richard Burns Rally	SCI	
TBC	Sam And Max: Freelance Police	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Black & White 2	Microsoft	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Oblivion Lost	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	
TBC	Driv3r	Atari	



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '04			
20 February	Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy	THQ	
MARCH '04			
12 March	Tak And The Power Of JuJu	THQ	
19 March	Dr Seuss' The Cat in the Hat	Vivendi	
Q1 04			
TBC	Fire Emblem	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Leaf Green/Fire Red	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Hamtaro: Rainbow Rescue	Nintendo	
TBC	Mortal Kombat Tournament	Midway	
TBC	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Mr Driller	Nintendo	
TBC	Jet Set Radio	SEGA	
TBC	Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	SEGA	
TBC	Sword Of Mana	Nintendo	
TBC	Sonic Battle	SEGA	
TBC	Wings Advance	Zoo Digital	

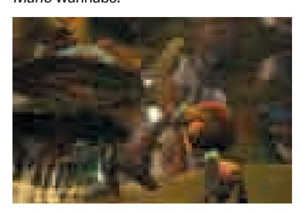
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault. We tried ever so hard…



PSYCHONAUTS

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

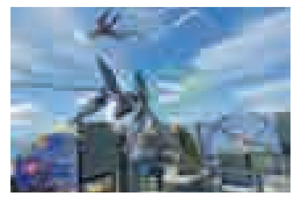
We're huge fans of Tim Schafer, and even though his latest project seems to have disappeared again we're sure Microsoft will still deliver. While some may scoff that this is yet another platformer, Schafer's involvement should ensure that *Psychonauts* is more than just another *Mario* wannabe.



STARFOX 2

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

With Nintendo giving away its intellectual property left, right and centre, we're intrigued to see how the next *StarFox* game will turn out. There's been no news at all since its lacklustre reception at last year's E3, so with any luck Namco has paid attention to all the criticism and is working on something special.



PSP

Format: PSP
Publisher: Sony

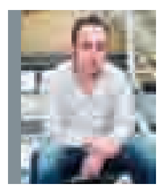
Okay, so it's not a game, but if there's one thing we're desperately looking forward to it's Sony's first handheld. With only a few months until E3 and that sexy design still causing us to drool uncontrollably, it's safe to say that this could be the biggest event of 2004. Is it the console to beat the GBA? It's your move, Nintendo…





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

JUST WHEN WE THINK WE'VE GOT IT SUSSED…



It's nice to see that the games industry isn't alone when it comes to throwing up shock results. With Christmas number ones *Mad World* and *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun*, the nation has the capacity to react unpredictably at any time. The biggest festive surprise was the fact there'll hopefully never be another *Pop Idol* now the fat lady has sung…

Multi-million pound decisions are based on the premise that the music, film and television industries can predict, with unerring accuracy, how successful product X will be. Advertising campaigns and promotional tours – the 'media mix', as marketing idiots call it – are nailed months in advance to ensure the launch goes without a hitch. And then you come along and mess it all up.

Many will be scratching their heads at the traditional December bloodbath. *Lord Of The Rings* was obviously going to be the gaming Christmas number one. Or *Pop Idol*, of course – you lot loved *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, so surely this would have a similar mainstream appeal. Some industry pundits even predicted a return to the top for *FIFA*. Mums buying for their boys, see? I had high hopes for *Prince Of Persia* – a game loved by those in the industry. Yet while its position improved from its original chart debut, the fact remains that one of the year's best games was overlooked by the majority of the public. If your apathy has cost me the chance of playing a sequel I'll be round to have a word.

But the best thing about the final Christmas charts this year is that no-one saw the results coming – even Ladbrokes neglected to include *Medal Of Honor* in its original list of favourites. In what's often accused of being a 'by-numbers' industry it's good to know we always have you to keep us in check.

Simon Byron
Director, Barrington Harvey PR

FROM THE FRONT

TAKE 2 CELEBRATES A SUCCESSFUL YEAR WHILE SONY AND MICROSOFT CONCENTRATE ON HARDWARE…

TAKE 2 JOINS THE BILLION-DOLLAR CLUB AND PREPARES FOR A NEW-YEAR ASSAULT

WE'RE IN THE MONEY

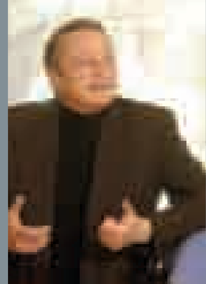
Thanks to record results in 2003, Take 2 Interactive has now become the only company (besides Electronic Arts) to break the magical billion-dollar sales barrier. The company achieved net sales of $1.04 billion, a massive 31 per cent improvement upon the previous year. Despite the controversy that surrounds Take 2's games, it's clear that violence definitely sells. *Grand Theft Auto 3* has performed extremely well in Japan, selling over 300,000 units. Add to this the re-release of *GTA3* and *Vice City* on the Xbox and Take 2 almost rivals Capcom when it comes to milking a successful product.

The disappointing *Manhunt* may not have been the runaway hit that Take 2 was hoping for, but it still managed a respectable appearance in the multiformat charts. The bloodshed will continue in 2004 as *Manhunt* is set to appear on both Xbox and PC, while the GBA will finally receive *Grand Theft Auto 3*. And, of course, we're looking forward to the next instalment of the *GTA* franchise which some websites are already calling *GTA: Sin City* (despite no official confirmation yet from Rockstar).

With all this extra money, it was inevitable that Take 2 would make further acquisitions, and along with *Carve* and *Red Dead Revolver* the biggest of these is the

DECEMBER CHEER?

SONY'S HANDHELD GETS A LAUNCH DATE



SCEE's Chris Deering has confirmed PSP launch.

Now that 2004 is upon us, Sony has finally announced when we can expect to be playing its PSP handheld. SCEE's president, Chris Deering, has revealed that Sony intends to release the console in December this year. Of course, this date is hardly set in stone but it's a clear indication that Sony is doing everything it can to ensure that its new machine (that has the potential to cripple Nintendo's dominance of the handheld market) will be released in time for the lucrative Christmas period.

Interestingly, it would now appear that the specifications for the PSP are going to be different to what was originally announced. Fortunately, rather than chopping out features (as happened with the PSX in Japan), Sony is considering adding to the machine's already impressive specs. PSP-to-PSX connectivity and GPS positioning services and messaging systems are said to be under consideration, though nothing has been confirmed.

SCEE's Technology Group recently revealed the inner workings of the console to prospective developers, and it seems that the biggest complaint about the machine is its 8Mb of main system RAM. It's possible that this is why development kits haven't been released yet; however, with the PSP's launch less than a year away, we're sure they'll be in the post soon. In the meantime, some developers have said that if the 8Mb spec isn't increased they can work around it.

official purchase of TDK. Bought for approximately $12.8 million, the deal has given Take 2 the likes of *Spy Vs Spy* and the *Robotech* franchise.

Jeff Lapin, Take 2's CEO, is obviously pleased about these purchases and believes the newly acquired IPs will benefit from the Take 2 touch. "We believe our proven product development and marketing capabilities will enhance TDK's product offerings and our distribution resources will offer additional outlets for TDK's products," he said.

But with *Army Men: Sarge's War* now on Take 2's books let's just hope the good fortunes are not about to change. Those little green men have a reputation…

BREAKDOWN OF TAKE 2'S NET SALES FOR 2003

- 1st quarter $408.4 million
- 2nd quarter $194.2 million
- 3rd quarter $155.6 million
- 4th quarter $278.5 million

TOTAL AMOUNT $1.04billion

NET SALES, FIRST HALF OF 2003 FISCAL YEAR

500
400
300
200
100
0

- Electronic Arts £475 million
- Take 2 £332 million
- Square Enix £107 million
- Activision £152 million

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Need For Speed: Underground	EA Games	Multi
2	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	Multi
3	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	EA Games	Multi
4	FIFA 2004	EA Sports	Multi
5	LOTR: Return Of The King	EA Games	Multi
6	The Sims: Bustin' Out	EA Games	Multi
7	Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Multi
8	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Multi
9	Norton Internet Security 2004	Norton	PC
10	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Multi

Electronic Arts continues to dominate the top end of the charts, while *The Simpsons: Hit & Run* is still exceeding expectations. Perhaps the biggest surprise is that an anti-virus program is doing so well.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of ELSPA (UK) Ltd. UK Full Price Sales Charts (All Formats) (w/e Sat 3 January, 2004)



COULD A JOB AD REVEAL A NEW DIRECTION FOR XBOX2?

OLD THREAT, NEW MEDIA

As Microsoft's Xbox has continued to gain ground the machine has become a breeding ground for piracy. So it was unsurprising when a job ad hinted that Xbox2 may use a new storage medium. Microsoft's careers website carried an ad for engineers who were able to "manage the design and development of the Xbox Game Disc for the next generation of Xbox console".

It's quite possible that the company is considering abandoning the DVD storage format in favour of a new medium that's harder to copy. Nintendo has already had huge success with the GameCube's mini-DVD discs and there's no doubt that Microsoft has the funds to research new game media.

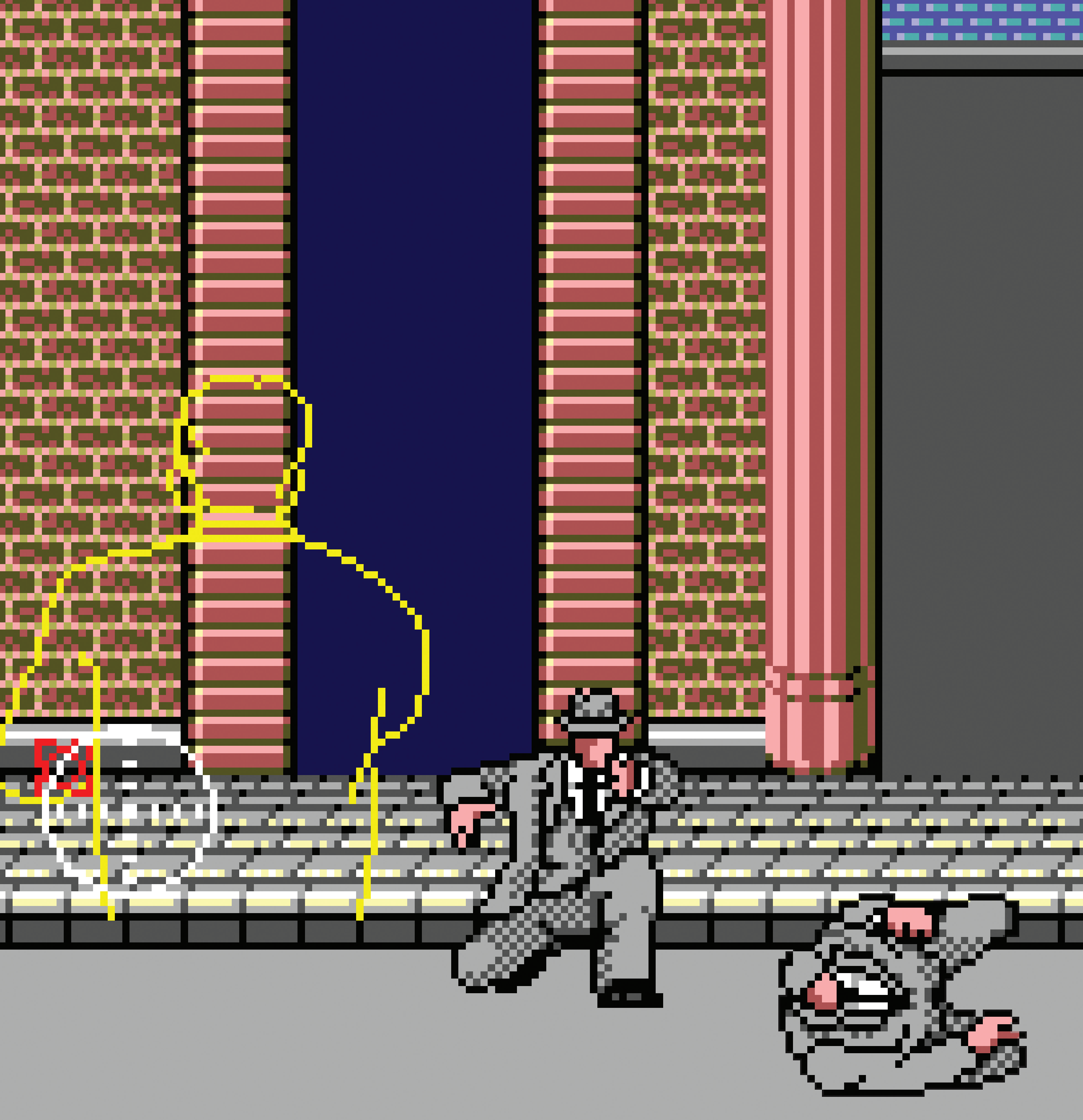
However, even if a new storage media is devised, the Xbox's ability to copy games onto its hard drive is bound to be causing Microsoft headaches. Of course, it could always release Xbox2 without a hard drive but this is bound to anger fans. And a new game format would almost certainly mean that the Xbox's follow-up wouldn't be backwards compatible…



The Xbox hard drive may be a thing of the past as part of a move to combat piracy.



Who fancies a bit of tommy-gun fun? **Dead Angle Master System [SEGA] 1989**



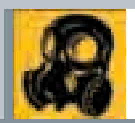
FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR



"YOUR TOOLBOX FOR DEALING WITH ENEMIES IS SO LARGE, EVERY ENCOUNTER CAN TURN OUT COMPLETELY DIFFERENTLY"
LARALYN MCWILLIAMS, LEAD DESIGNER, PANDEMIC STUDIOS

Your men will make the best of a bad situation, but leaving them out in the open is a death sentence.

Many items of cover are destructible, forcing you to think up a cunning Plan B on the spot.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Pandemic was formed in 1998 when the teams behind PC strategy titles *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign* broke away from Activision and began work on sequels to these titles independently. Now the studio has offices in Los Angeles and Brisbane, and has three top-secret projects in development besides *FSW*.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: TCW 2003 [Multiformat]**
- **DARK REIGN 2 2000 [PC]**
- **BATTLEZONE II 2000 [PC]**

YOUR LUCKY TRIGGER FINGER WON'T SAVE YOU THIS TIME…

"Vot! Zis can never verk!" was allegedly the incensed reaction of THQ's German representative on first learning that players will never actually get to pull the trigger themselves in tactical squad-based action title *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Admittedly, at face value the game's concept does conjure up a horribly misleading image of *Conflict: Desert Storm* with all the action drained out, but as soon as you put this idea firmly out of your head and instead think of *FSW* as a new breed of RTS title that actually puts you down on the ground with your troops, you can begin to understand why it was named 'Best Original Game' at E3 by the show's Game Critics Awards panel.

"*Full Spectrum Warrior* is all about making tactical decisions under battle conditions," explains lead designer Laralyn McWilliams. "You are the Squad Leader of two dismounted light infantry fighter teams, each consisting of a team leader, rifleman, automatic rifleman and grenadier." Originally commissioned by the US Army as a training simulator, the game recognises that gaining the upper hand in urban warfare is, in reality, all about tactical movement and positional strategy, with very little hinging on targeting accuracy.

As Squad Leader you can focus on orchestrating the incisive flanking and covering manoeuvres that will ultimately win the day, safe in the knowledge that your squads are trained to look after themselves in combat situations – as they would be in real life. "The soldiers are intelligent on their own – they understand what their roles are and what they should be doing at any time," says McWilliams, "Your role as the Squad Leader is purely to give them information about where to move and which way to shoot."

Mimicking the role as accurately as possible was essential for the original simulation's training value and, as McWilliams explains, playing the positional chess match out in the field is a full-time job that leaves no time for gunplay: "Squad Leaders don't shoot their weapons unless they have to – once you start shooting you're not aware of your surroundings any more and you can't do your job of assessing the situation your men are in, which is actually the most important job of all."

Similarly, with the soldiers under your command having such advanced AI, and their automatic adoption of intelligent cover formations when carrying out orders, cynics will question how much is left for the player to do – until they actually sit down and play the game, that is. "When we pumped up the realism for the retail version, we found the situation was so intense that people are still overwhelmed when they come under fire, even though the controls are really straightforward and they don't have to concentrate on shooting a gun themselves," says McWilliams. "It's a good thing the soldiers are so smart and can take care of themselves because you've got so much to think about already there's no way you could possibly tell each man where to stand and which way to shoot – otherwise they'd all be dead."

Keeping the action at a suitably fast pace, your soldiers' self-preservation

"GAINING THE UPPER HAND IN REAL URBAN WARFARE IS ALL ABOUT TACTICAL MOVEMENT AND POSITIONAL STRATEGY"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios
RELEASE: Xbox: Q2 '04, PC: TBA
GENRE: Strategy Action
PLAYERS: (1-2 Online)

Pandemic's former military training simulation gives us an intense lesson in urban warfare tactics.

REPLAY VALUE

Your actions are continuously recorded using a clever bit of technology brought over from the Army sim, which Pandemic has put to intriguing use, as director Will Stahl explains: "It replays the whole mission from beginning to wherever you ended it, so you can actually pause it, break the camera off and check out why you died. Then you can jump right in and try to do a better job by learning from your mistakes. One of the great aspects is that you'll be able to exchange these over Live servers, which means you can download somebody else's game and take over from any point in their replay."



Losing a man in the field is unacceptable so you'll have to look after your troops.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR CONT.

instincts are very welcome indeed and allow you to concentrate purely on tactical decisions, but with so much resting on its shoulders is the AI up to the job? "We have some very important trade secrets in how our soldiers understand the world and what they're able to do," McWilliams reveals. "Having them do what you tell them is easy, and games like *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow Six* manage that really well. The main place we differ is that when the situation changes our soldiers know what to do for the best, and that was really where most of our emphasis went."

Obviously, to be of any use in teaching troops how to operate in real-life confrontations, enemy behaviour had to be clinically authentic too. And, as McWilliams reminds us, even an untrained rebel aimlessly firing an automatic weapon can pose a serious problem when you're talking about real bullets and with real lives

"PLAYING THE POSITIONAL CHESS MATCH OUT IN THE FIELD IS A FULL-TIME JOB THAT LEAVES NO TIME FOR GUNPLAY"

at stake. "The Army has zero tolerance for casualties," says McWilliams. "It's not acceptable to lose even one man to accomplish a goal, and you have the same mandate in *FSW*." There's no room for running and gunning in this game, and ensuring your squads are constantly covered from every possible angle by the environment and each other makes your decisions as strategic commander absolutely crucial.

Certain key challenges the game throws into your path are obviously preconceived, but since randomly generated enemies can appear at any moment even the most experienced player can never let their guard down for a second, as McWilliams points out: "Some of our enemies are encountered in the same place every time, and some are random. But your toolbox for how you deal with them is so large, every encounter can turn out completely differently because the enemy is completely reactive to each decision you make."

While the simple act of crossing an open street safely is a rewarding experience in itself, the sense of achievement derived from turning a stalemate shootout into a checkmate situation by means of sheer cunning is immense. "It's just so incredibly satisfying and, like winning a chess match, it never gets old," says McWilliams. "Playing a game of chess is different every time, and when you finally get to execute that killer move you've been setting up for the last five moves it's a really rewarding experience."

Unlike the version designed for use by trained Army personnel, us mere mortals will be subject to a comprehensive training course in the tactical knowledge essential to getting the most from the game. By offering all the rewards of using your brain rather than brawn to win the day, and with the thrilling intensity of a fully cinematic action title, the *FSW* engine has the potential to deliver a truly unique experience.

After spending some time with the game, our one remaining concern was how dangerous *FSW* could be if it were to fall into the wrong hands… Director Will Stahl was quick to put our minds at rest: "Nothing we're showing here is top secret – everything in terms of the tactics is freely available. The Army's opinion was actually: 'we don't care if the enemy knows what we're going to do, because there's nothing they can do to stop us anyway'."

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

Translating a simulation designed for military use into an entertaining retail product proved a far more intricate task than the team at Pandemic first anticipated. The more obvious additions were a story (which follows the US task force over 24 crucial hours as they move to dislodge an evil dictator from power), more variation in the scenarios, and upping the production values to reflect those of a next-generation Xbox title. The authenticity of a few trivial elements also had to be toned down a notch, with the dialogue falling somewhere between realistic US Army banter and that more familiarly depicted by Hollywood.



Laying down suppressing fire enables your other team to make their move in relative safety.

Point your men in the direction of cover and they'll take an intelligent formation on their own.

PUBLISHER PROFILE

THQ (short for Toy Headquarters) has offices in England, Germany, France, Korea and Australia, with its base of operations located in Calabasas Hills, California. It publishes games in 77 countries around the world, and has over 400 development staff spread across its portfolio of internal studios.

HISTORY

- **BROKEN SWORD** 2003 [Multiformat]
- **FIRE WARRIOR** 2003 [PS2, PC]
- **RED FACTION** 2001 [PS2, PC]



Urban settings like these provide plenty of opportunities for taking cover when needed.

Flushing a target out into the open makes them easy meat for your trained gunners.

When it comes to gaining the upper hand, positional strategy is more important than sharp shooting.

"SOLDIERS ARE SMART ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES, AS LONG AS YOU PUT THEM IN THE RIGHT SITUATION"

WILL STAHL, DIRECTOR, PANDEMIC STUDIOS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BRAIN OVER BRAWN

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 - HANDS ON + CHESS = FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

DRIV3R



"WE DON'T WANT TO GET BOGGED DOWN IN SIMULATION BUT JUST MAKE SURE THAT THE RESPONSE OF THINGS AND THE LOOK OF THINGS IS AS REALISTIC AS POSSIBLE"

MARTIN EDMONDSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, REFLECTIONS

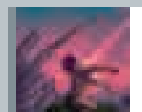
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

JUMPING THE LIGHTS WITH DRIV3R

GTA III - THE GETAWAY + THE FRENCH CONNECTION = DRIV3R

■ The PS2 version of *Driv3r* is very like that on the Xbox; only slightly better textures set them apart.





DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1984, Reflections is one of the UK's premier developers. After working on several games for the BBC Micro it moved to the Amiga where it produced the ground-breaking *Shadow Of The Beast*. The company produced several hit games for the PSone including *Destruction Derby* and *Driver*. Its first next-gen game was *Stuntman* on PS2.

HISTORY

■ **STUNTMAN** 2002 [PlayStation2]
■ **DESTRUCTION DERBY** 1995 [PlayStation]
■ **SHADOW OF THE BEAST** 1989 [Amiga]

THE DRIVER IS BACK BUT THIS TIME HE'S… MUCH THE SAME?

It's almost a given that *Driv3r* is going to be a big hit on PlayStation2 and Xbox when it's released this March. So strong is the *Driver* franchise that even though it's been five years since the last game in the series, anticipation for this title is reaching fever pitch. This, in part, can be attributed to the popularity of *GTA III*, *The Getaway* and the slew of city-based action/cop/driving games of late – it seems, for the time being anyway, that any game featuring cars, cities and crime is almost guaranteed box-office success.

However, *Driv3r* is a little different from anything else of its ilk, with Reflections opting to focus on the driving part of the game with the third-person 'on foot' sections playing a supporting role. By taking this gameplay-defining decision it is staying true to the spirit of *Driver* where, in the first game, you stayed in your car. That said, Tanner, the undercover cop hero of the first two titles, can leave the car in *Driv3r*. He can also fire a range of guns and perform simple actions such as pushing switches and taking any car he likes the look of.

Tanner's increased mobility provides an important link between objectives, and while the gameplay retains a strictly ordered mission-based structure, there is a certain amount of freedom within that framework. There is never just one way to solve a mission, and freedom (such as it is) comes in a variety of ways. Finding your own route on the map is a simple way of opening up the gameplay but there are also certain scripted ways in which your decisions can change the way a mission is played. Stealing a drug baron's favourite sports coupe, for example, could be achieved by breaking down the gate of his villa and shooting up the place or, if you want to play things easy, you can hijack one of his trucks and drive straight in.

Spanning three cities, the story follows Tanner's investigation into a global drug ring. The action begins in Miami and then moves to Nice in the south of France and finally to exotic Istanbul. These distinctive settings have afforded Reflections plenty of scope for mission design and the driving experience. Miami, for example, is a place with both glitz and grime, Nice offers winding mountain roads, and Istanbul has fantastic elevation – a perfect setting for exhilarating jumps and car chases.

As far as handling goes, *Driv3r* retains the first game's joy in driving – it's fun to drive every vehicle in the game, whether it's a Ford GT-inspired sports car, a speedboat, an articulated truck or a high-speed Japanese superbike. And, of course, there'll be plenty of opportunity for driving purely for fun, for exploring and performing stunts. Underpinning all this is a physics engine first developed for *Stuntman* and tweaked so it can handle things like hinged doors and the level of car destructability that the *Driver* series demands (every degree all the way to total destruction). Likewise, the lighting is quite spectacular, lending the locations a wonderful sun-kissed look.

But the question remains: can *Driv3r* keep pace with the recent pretenders to the throne it once occupied? So far the signs are good: it promises a driving experience that's second to none, incredibly detailed and lovingly realised cities, and a story and film-like experience that most games can only hope for. And we expect that by staying true to the original title, *Driv3r* will prove that it takes more than a formula to do this kind of game.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Reflections
RELEASE: March '04
GENRE: Driving Action
PLAYERS: 1

■ Cars, crimes and cities – the return of *Driver* could hardly be better timed. It's the long-awaited next-gen debut of one of the finest and coolest PlayStation games.

TALENT SHOW

Why get standard voice actors when you can get A-list, bona fide Hollywood stars in your game? It's perhaps of a sign of how much is expected of *Driv3r* by Atari that the game will feature some major-league voice talent. Playing the part of Tanner, the game's lead, is Michael Madsen of *Reservoir Dogs* fame (you know, the one who cut the cop's ear off to the tune of *Stuck In The Middle With You*). Mickey Rourke (*Angel Heart*) will take the role of Jericho (think crime lord boss dude) and Ving Rhames (*Pulp Fiction*) will feature as Tobias Jones, Tanner's partner. Who says games aren't the new movies?

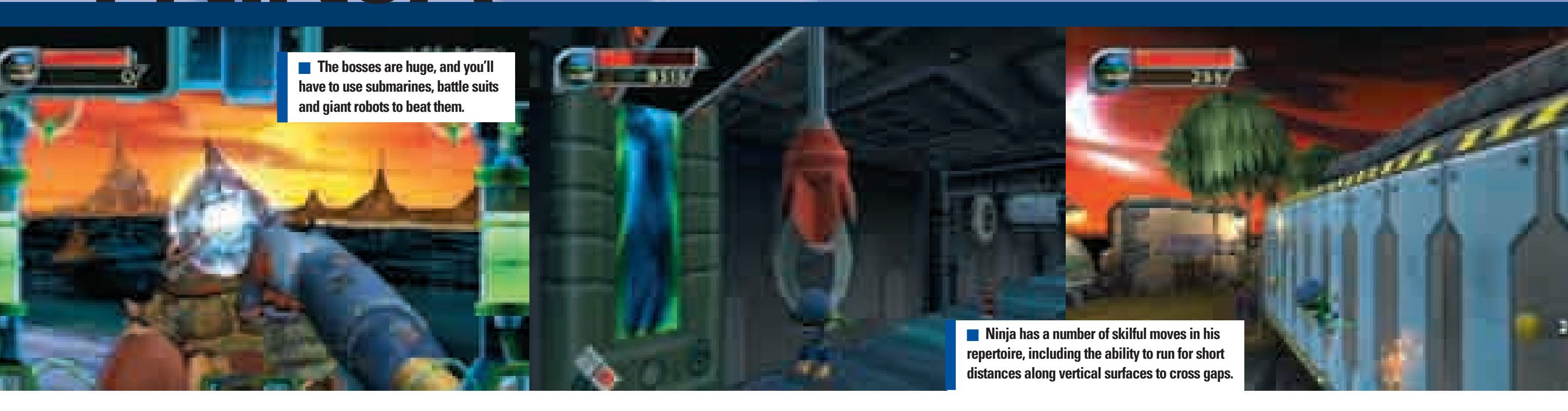
> "DRIV3R RETAINS THE FIRST GAME'S JOY IN DRIVING – IT'S FUN TO DRIVE EVERY VEHICLE IN THE GAME"



■ Tanner is limited in his actions but can run, shoot and push switches. He can also fire weapons on the move.

■ *Driv3r* features full movie directors' options where you can film your own mini action sequences.

I-NINJA


The bosses are huge, and you'll have to use submarines, battle suits and giant robots to beat them.

Ninja has a number of skilful moves in his repertoire, including the ability to run for short distances along vertical surfaces to cross gaps.

PLENTY OF GAME STYLES, BUT ONLY ONE NINJA

PS2 **Ninjas for kids? Baulk all you want, but the upcoming release of *I-Ninja* looks set to redress the balance that's been upset by games like *Tenchu, Nightshade* and *Ninja Gaiden.*** Pushing itself as a game aimed specifically at younger gamers – with the emphasis on platform leaping and sword swinging, as opposed to the usual stealth and merciless killing that you'd associate with ninjas – *I-Ninja* feels more like Konami's *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*, albeit for a 21st-Century audience. This isn't really a problem, though there's no doubt that *I-Ninja* does feel a little simplistic against the glut of multi-genre platform titles available right now.

Thankfully, it's comforting to learn that there's a whole lot more to this game than meets the eye – just when you think you've got it sussed and know what's coming, it manages to blindside you with yet another mission style or clever little idea that plays differently to everything that's come before. For every stage that sees you leaping platforms, swinging on chains and running along walls, you'll have one that requires you to do something unique; rolling a ball along a treacherous sloped path, chasing a lit fuse in an effort to reach the explosives before they blow, duking it out with a hundred-foot-tall robot and so on. Interestingly, these multiple styles never clash with each other, and rather than feeling disjointed they all mesh together to form a solid little platformer.

On top of this, more effort has gone into *I-Ninja* than perhaps most people will realise, with the game's internal physics being particularly well-implemented. From the moving platforms that react to the weight balance depending on where you stand, to the realistic ball movement during the *Monkey Ball*-esque section, or the way that Ninja handles while balanced on a barrel of gunpowder – it's all rather impressive, though the chances of the average gamer appreciating such things are pretty slim.

Proving to be more fun than you might expect (and having a fair amount of replay value thanks to the numerous tasks that each stage offers upon a return visit), we have to admit that we're pleasantly surprised by *I-Ninja*. While we're not entirely convinced that limiting it to a PlayStation2-exclusive release in Europe is such a good idea – after all, look what that did to *Prince Of Persia* and *Beyond Good & Evil* – at least we can take solace in the fact that it looks like it'll be better than a lot of the other generic platformers that have come out recently.

> **"IT MIGHT LOOK BASIC, BUT I-NINJA MANAGES TO HIDE PLENTY OF CLEVER IDEAS AND NEAT LITTLE TOUCHES BEHIND ITS SIMPLISTIC DESIGN"**

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony/Namco
DEVELOPER: Argonaut
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: Platform Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

A simple but fun platformer with more gameplay styles than most other games put together – and this time they actually work. Yes, really.


Despite using a simplistic and cartoon-based graphical style, *I-Ninja's* animation and textures are surprisingly detailed.


eMag

COLD WINTER



The opening torture scene. What can you do? Stay away from Chang political prison…

A typical multiplayer scene. Networkability is not yet confirmed, but Swordfish hasn't denied it, either…

CAN SWORDFISH CUT IT WITH ITS REAL-WORLD FPS?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: VU Games
DEVELOPER: Swordfish Studios
RELEASE: Q3 '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-2

Vivendi unleashes a shooter combining the action of *GoldenEye* with a nifty physics engine and intelligent enemy AI.

PS2 **It's a common call sign of the espionage genre to romanticise the business of dirty dealing, so having your lead character begin his adventure on the inside of a Chinese prison suggests a break from the norm.** And this is exactly the set-up Swordfish has given Andrew Sterling – MI5 hitman and *Cold Winter* protagonist. But this is no Wrong Man-esque story of redemption – Sterling is guilty of murdering a Chinese double agent and doesn't have a suavity-fuelled get-out clause.

To take the glamour out of spying even further, the first-level prison environment is a murky, stagnant place – a strange showcase for the game's sophisticated Karma physics engine. The physics are an impressive first for PlayStation2 – doors can be blocked with tables; tables can be pushed over and used as on-the-hop cover; dying enemies pull furniture over as they fall, while their brains splat against the nearest wall and trickle downwards.

Compared to the 'reality' of *Red Faction* (or even *Vice City*), it makes previous attempts at a PS2 physics engine seem rather weak.

But then even the grime looks better than most. Light-mapping (rather than the PS2's standard vertex colour shaders) heightens clarity, and the dynamic texturing on display is more Xbox than PlayStation in terms of resolution quality. It's a level of attention to detail which makes for a great resumé – ragdoll technology, real-world physics, full facial motion capture… there are plenty of 'big word' elements here. The real surprise is that Swordfish has taken these elements and done something solid with them.

Also promising to impress is the level of intelligence afforded to enemies (AI being the weakness of even the best PS2 shooters to date), as enemy squads have been assigned a legitimate hierarchy. As such, they'll follow a chain of command lest you take out the team's superior and destroy its morale. Additionally, rather than follow scripted routines, the enemy bots will eagerly give chase until they find you should you choose to retreat.

Cold Winter promises an immersive experience, right down to the game's use of items. Need a Molotov cocktail? Then you'll need to find a bottle, a rag and some petrol and build one. Can't get past a guard? Try sprinkling contact poison on a banknote and distracting him with some cash. The focus here has clearly been on the atmospheric effects (one programmer has been working on particle effects from day one to ensure continuity), and the entire package holds together in an impressively cinematic manner. Cut-scenes have been rendered to save on loading times, and Brit actor Nathaniel Parker has been hired to give Sterling a voice.

The most surprising element of *Cold Winter*, though, will undoubtedly be the way it eschews the current trend for stealth in favour of something more akin to the N64's *GoldenEye*, and according to Julian Widdows, development director at Swordfish, this is entirely deliberate. "The PS2 first-person shooter is yet to have a defining moment," he says. "We're making sure the core gameplay is thoroughly compelling."

It's still a little early to tell if Swordfish can rise to the challenge it has set itself and tailor the gameplay to suit such an ambitious project. Either way, *Cold Winter* is sure to act as a wake-up call, demonstrating a level of innovation many other PS2 developers should be striving for.

MAINLINE YOUR SKILLS

The Adrenaline meter in *Cold Winter* functions in two ways: the first (and most obvious) is that Stem-packs can be used to replenish energy, and this can be done an infinite number of times so long as you can remain hidden for the ten seconds or so required to administer the medicine. The second use for Adrenaline is more action-specific – quick-kill combos will give Sterling 'an edge', whereby the adrenal gland pumps and the game slows down, *Max Payne*-style. This encourages the player to strive a littler harder in every life-threatening situation and succeed solely on quick thinking and trigger pulling, rather than just giving in to failure and replaying the level.

"COLD WINTER DEMONSTRATES A LEVEL OF INNOVATION MANY OTHER PLAYSTATION DEVELOPERS SHOULD BE STRIVING FOR"



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Rising like a phoenix from the ashes of Rage, Swordfish Studios made an initial splash with *Jonah Lomu Rugby* on the PSone. After success with PC espionage title *Hostile Waters*, the company turned its attention to making a PC-quality shooter for the console market – the result is *Cold Winter*.

HISTORY

- **HOSTILE WATERS** 2001 [PC]
- **UEFA STRIKER** 2000 [PSone]
- **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY** 1999 [PSone]

He tried to hide behind the table, but it didn't leave him an escape route. Fool.

Expect all your usual globe-trotting spy locations to feature in *Cold Winter*.

"WE WANT TO CREATE A PC GAMING EXPERIENCE – OR AS CLOSE AS YOU CAN ON A CONSOLE"

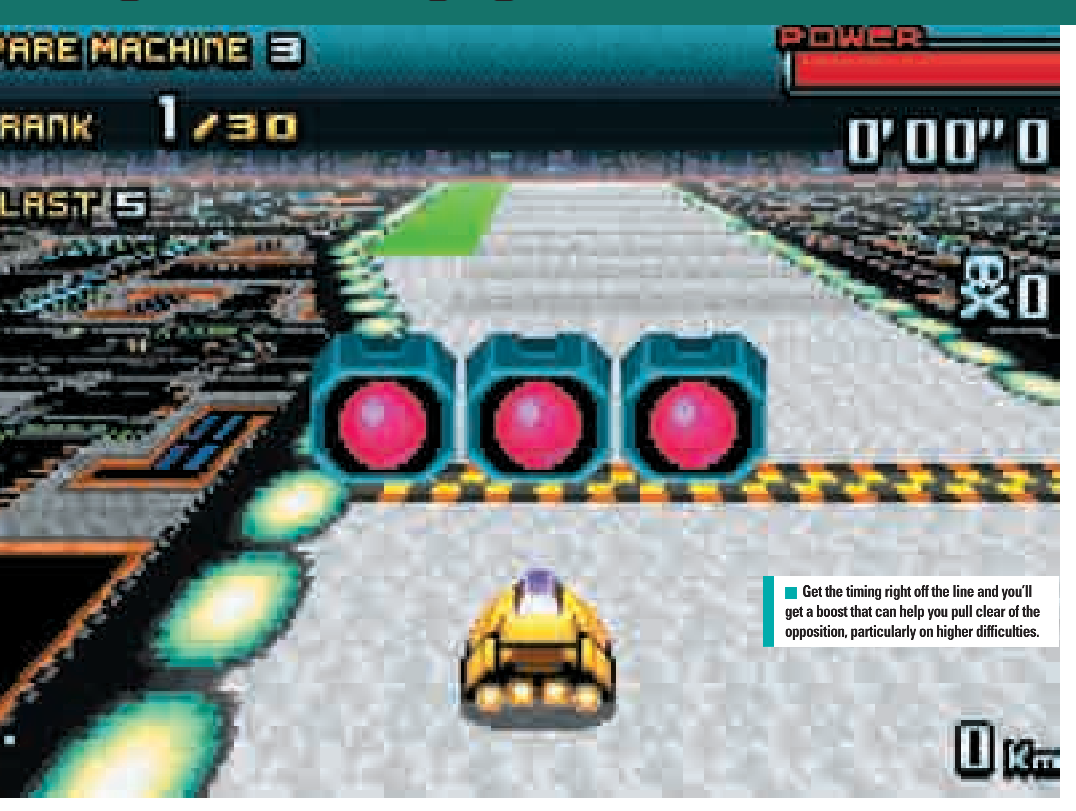
JULIAN WIDDOWS, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, SWORDFISH STUDIOS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IF JAMES BOND STAYED UP ALL NIGHT EATING CHEESE...

GOLDENEYE x HALF-LIFE 2 - ALIENS = COLD WINTER

F-ZERO: LEGEND OF FALCON



■ Get the timing right off the line and you'll get a boost that can help you pull clear of the opposition, particularly on higher difficulties.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ This incarnation of *F-Zero* has plenty of new material but may have lost some of the challenge…

EVEN FASTER THAN A SPEEDING CARTOON BULLET

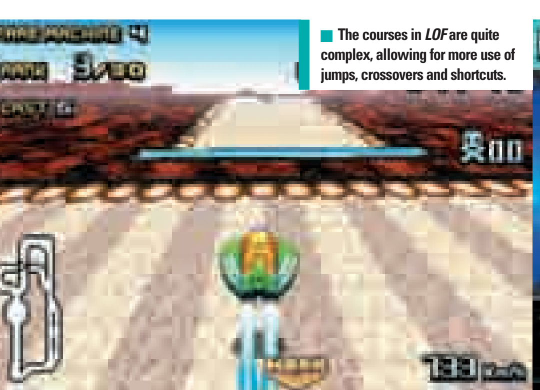
Animation may have come a long way since the days of *Captain N: The Game Master*, but thanks to the likes of *Pokémon* it's obvious that turning videogames into cartoons isn't a bad idea after all. Take Nintendo's latest attempt to cash in on the anime market with *F-Zero*, for example. Currently airing in Japan, *F-Zero: Legend Of Falcon* follows Captain Falcon and new boy Ryu Suzaku as they do their best to stomp corruption out of the F-Zero race league – inspired stuff, we're sure you'll agree.

And now you can play the game of the cartoon of the game, with character and vehicle design taken straight from the cartoon. *Legend Of Falcon* (the game) is essentially a high-speed racer that looks at first almost exactly like the previous GBA *F-Zero* outing, *Maximum Velocity*, but has more under its hood than you might have thought. Still, you can't help thinking that Nintendo has pinched a couple of ideas from a few other futuristic racers.

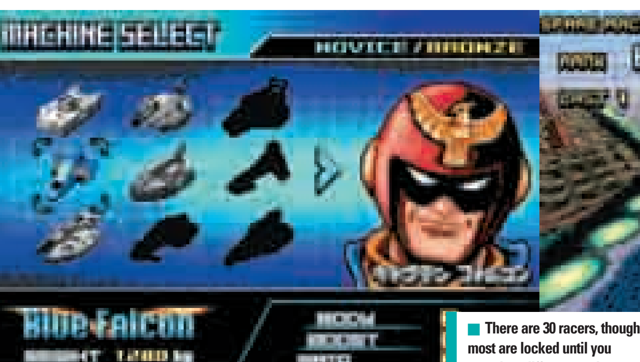
For instance, the inclusion of a Story mode (which loosely follows the plot of the cartoon) on top of the regular Circuit mode is something ripped straight out of *F-Zero GX*, although that's not a bad thing considering it was a decent enough concept in the first place. *Legend Of Falcon* expands on it and offers the ability to play as eight different characters across a number of challenges – starting off as Ryu, you soon unlock new racers like Captain Falcon, Samurai Goroh and Pico, complete with their own storylines. There's also a new mode that plays a lot like the License Tests in *Gran Turismo*, with multiple classes that challenge you to complete set parts of a track (ranging from a few corners to several laps) in a particular vehicle within a certain time – something that makes a nice change from the more conventional parts of the game.

> "LEGEND OF FALCON'S LONGEVITY SHOULD MIRROR THAT OF ITS COUSIN ON THE GAMECUBE"

By mixing new modes and some cartoon-style animation on the vehicles with the old-school style of *F-Zero* graphics, Nintendo is certainly doing its best to revitalise the GBA side of the series. Our only concern right now surrounds reports of the game's difficulty being swung in the wrong direction; whereas *Maximum Velocity* was rather unfair, *Legend Of Falcon* appears to be a bit of a pushover. Hopefully, this will be corrected for the Western release.



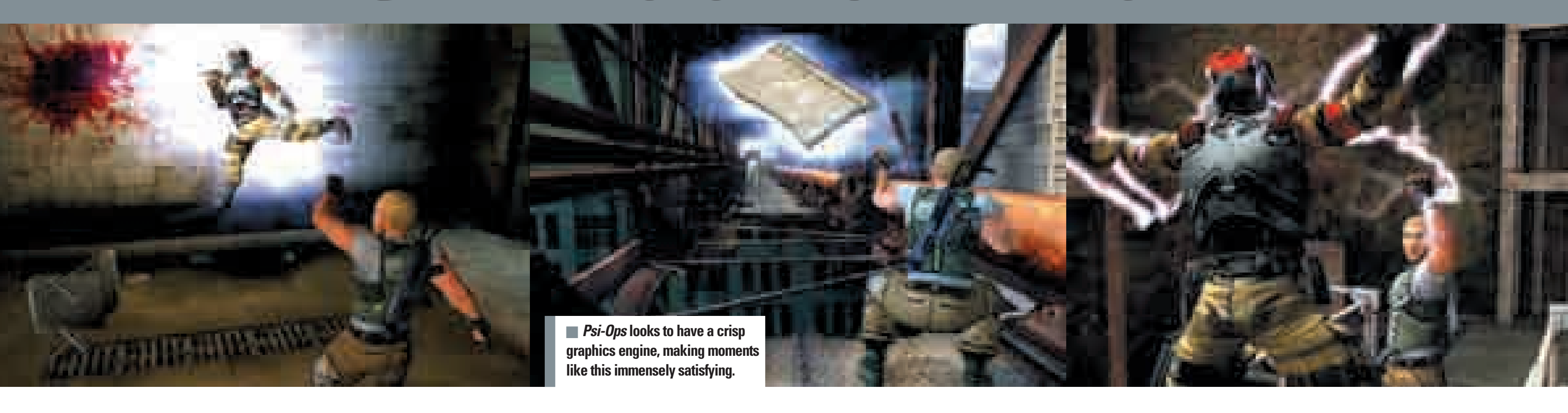
■ The courses in *LOF* are quite complex, allowing for more use of jumps, crossovers and shortcuts.



■ There are 30 racers, though most are locked until you complete different modes.


eMag

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY


Psi-Ops looks to have a crisp graphics engine, making moments like this immensely satisfying.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

Putting the ESP into espionage, Midway's third-person shooter includes special psychic abilities.

THE P IS PSILENT, BUT DON'T MIND US…

Reading like the ramblings of Philip K Dick, the outline for *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* could be hard to swallow. Not only are you expected to accept the existence of psychic powers such as telekinesis, but also to believe that your name is the unlikely Nick Scryer and that you're suffering from a bout of amnesia engineered to avoid psionic detection by foreign powers. However, if you can muster the suspension of disbelief needed to comprehend such a situation it's quite possible that *Psi-Ops* will be a treat.

Starting life last year as the abysmally titled *ESPionage*, the game was canned in its entirety by Midway who decided to start over from scratch – making the whole operation a great deal more than the average pre-release name change, and hopefully ensuring that the title will capitalise on some of its potential rather than squander it on a quick buck like so many pre-Christmas releases.

As Scryer, a psi-operative soldier looking to bring down evil terrorist organisation The Movement, players are thrown into the maelstrom brain-wiped and with few talents. Nick will gradually recover memories throughout the game; these will manifest further psychic abilities and open up each narrative chapter of the game. Telekinesis can be used to throw items or people as projectiles, or to shield Scryer from harm, but the most interesting ability should prove to be the 'PK-Surf' option whereby players can pick up a sheet of metal with their mind and ride it, thus fulfilling long dormant Silver Surfer/Ice Man fantasies. You can also control fire and will be blessed with a remote viewing facility (a sort of 'astral projection into the next room to look for danger signs') and some potentially hilarious mind control which allows you to take control of NPC bots and play as them temporarily. And let's not forget the *Scanners*-esque head explosions…

Psi-Ops appears to fall somewhere between *Max Payne* and *Legacy Of Kain* in terms of gameplay – logic puzzles and enormous firefights will need to be overcome, and Midway has suggested it has worked hard to ensure multiple ways to complete both. There's no doubt it's a brave move to throw a game away and start again, and Midway should be applauded for trying to ensure high quality. Let's just hope that *Psi-Ops* gets its release on time and doesn't fade away like other 'rebuilt' titles that never see the light of day.

"PSI-OPS PROMISES GUN-TOTING ACTION, TRICKY PUZZLES AND FAST-PACED PSIONIC CHAOS"


It's definitely not a game for the kids. Just look at the aftermath of a Mind Feed…

Flames are one of the harder effects to get right, and this fireball looks better than most. Got any marshmallows?


eMag

RACE DRIVER 2: THE ULTIMATE DRIVING SIMULATOR



Gavin Raeburn is once again on board to ensure that cars handle as realistically as possible.

For when taking corners in an AC Cobra simply isn't enough…

CAN THE CODIES' 'ULTIMATE DRIVING SIM' OVERTAKE PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: Driving
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-12 Online)

Codemasters' *TOCA* franchise prepares for another evolutionary step…

Codemasters' *TOCA* series has come a long way since it first screeched onto the PlayStation in 1997. The biggest departure to date has been the inclusion of *Race Driver*'s Story mode; but, never one to rest on its laurels, Codemasters has turned to the Xbox in order to take the series to the next logical level – namely, competitive online racing.

Of course, many would say that Bizarre Creations' *Project Gotham Racing 2* has this aspect of Xbox live already sewn up, and who are we to argue? Fortunately, Codemasters is promising a title that has the potential to be every bit as good as the current king of the tarmac. Holding true to the formula 'more players means more fun', *Race Driver 2* will allow a total of 12 drivers to burn rubber on the game's 56 fully licensed tracks. Though the majority of the Live elements are being kept under wraps at the moment, we're confident that Codemasters will realise the importance of *PGR2* and act accordingly.

"THE ABILITY TO RACE ON LICENSED TRACKS IS A BONUS FOR PETROL HEADS EVERYWHERE"

Gamers may scoff at the meagre amount of vehicles (*Race Driver 2* has 35 cars on offer compared to *PGR2*'s 102), but the chance to race flat-out in huge trucks is not something to be sniffed at. Likewise, there may be no Enzos here but that's not to say that tearing around the likes of Surfers Paradise in an Aston Martin or Jaguar XKR won't deliver its own high-octane thrills and spills.

Race Driver 2's biggest improvement, however, promises to be the highly detailed cinematic plot that will account for the bulk of the main offline game. Following a group of hopeful raw recruits; the storyline will see you competing against 11 other drivers in a series of 'reality TV' eliminator-style events. Beat the other hopefuls and you'll eventually get to drive as a Masters Grand Prix professional.

Visually, everything seems to be shaping up nicely, with all manner of dynamic lighting and bump-mapping effects in place to ensure that everything looks as realistic as possible. Add to this a brand new physics engine that promises to capture every physical nuance of each vehicle and we're confident that Codemasters will be able to make good on everything it's promising.

While *Race Driver* ended up feeling rather lacklustre, we're sure that *PGR2* will provide the incentive Codemasters is looking for to improve its popular franchise. The next few months should be very interesting…



With 11 other racers to compete against, pile-ups will be commonplace.


eMag

GRAN TURISMO 4



Around 500 performance, classic and rally cars will be available in the finished game. Time to extend the garage…

As ever, the first-person view is the only way to fully appreciate the driving experience.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

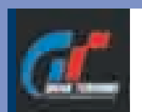
QUALITY AND QUANTITY

GT3: A-SPEC + TONS OF CARS x THE REAL THING = GRAN TURISMO 4

Despite the *Prologue* only featuring five tracks, there's some impressive contrast between them.

"REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGY DELIVERS ENHANCED, IF NOT PERFECTED, GAME PHYSICS AND GRAPHICS"

SONY PRESS RELEASE



SERIES PROFILE

■ The original *Gran Turismo* took the gaming world by storm in 1998, sporting the most realistic handling dynamics seen in a simulation (for the time, anyway) and near photo-perfect replays. Many pretenders to its throne have tried to imitate its revered authenticity and career mode structure, with varying degrees of success.

HISTORY

- ■ GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC 2001 [PS2]
- ■ GRAN TURISMO 2 1999 [PSone]
- ■ GRAN TURISMO 1998 [PSone]

SONY'S DEFINITIVE RACER IMPRESSES ON ITS PRELIMINARY LAP

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2 (1-6 Online)

■ We take the *Prologue* version of *GT4* for a spin to put Sony's claims of a near-perfect driving sim to the test.

For almost six years now, the legendary *Gran Turismo* series has enjoyed its status as racing's definitive franchise – a benchmark to which countless titles have aspired. Despite their inevitable similarities, every *GT* incarnation has stretched the boundaries of what was considered to be the cutting edge, and few would deny that 2001's *A-Spec* comfortably extended Sony's reign as proud owner of the driving sim of choice. Until *Project Gotham Racing 2* came along, that is. Splitting the virtual racing community down the middle like never before, while many were quick to leap to the ageing champ's defence, Bizarre Creations' turbo-charged youngster just shaded it on the final straight for most gamers.

Keen to put a dampener on Microsoft's celebrations, however, Sony was quick to issue the gaming world with a stark reminder of what was waiting around the corner, revving its engines ready to reclaim the throne and leave *Gotham* fans eating their words and plenty of dust. Rather than rushing *Gran Turismo 4* out of the blocks before its final coat of polish was buffed to a shine, Sony unleashed a *Prologue* disc in its native Japan to reassure an adoring public that the best things truly will come to those who wait.

Offering much more than a mere teaser of what we can look forward to in the coming months, the preview lets gamers get to grips with the all-new handling physics by providing a fully playable line-up of 50 vehicles and five testing circuits. Retailing for around £20 (although Sony has no plans to release a similar product over here), the disc gives Japanese gamers a pretty comprehensive hands-on taste of what was previously just a string of ambitious promises.

With only 12 cars selectable from the start, ranging from a classic 1971 Nissan Fairlady to the spanking new Skyline Coupe, there's limited opportunity to fully appreciate the astounding diversity in vehicle behaviour, so it was straight to School mode for us where the remaining 38 models were waiting to be unlocked. Challenges range from negotiating a couple of testing corners, through to gruelling five-lap time trials, with each success adding another set of wheels to our collection.

Taking our amassed garage of rally, performance and classic cars out for a proper spin around the block in Arcade mode, the revolutionary physics engine and meticulous attention to detail lavished on simulating the handling of each model all comes together beautifully. Okay, so we've never actually taken a McLaren F1 around a racetrack to judge whether Polyphony has achieved as precise a recreation of the car's behaviour as it claims, but we can safely say that every vehicle demonstrates a more noticeably varied set of handling dynamics than in any of the previous games.

The five tracks also impress as both a showcase of the game's astonishing visual calibre and an indication of further variation to the driving experience. Although still a little rough around the edges (and the absence of multiple-car races at this stage prevents an assessment of whether the last game's AI issues have been resolved), *Prologue* casts aside any doubt that what is to follow will be very special indeed.

PROJECT GOTHAM WHO?

Currently edging it from a game that's been around for two and a half years on a technically inferior system, *PGR2*'s days on top of the podium could well be numbered if *GT4* maintains the form it's currently showing. Polyphony has practically worked miracles to deliver visuals that bridge the gap between the PS2 and Xbox, while the purported 300 parameters against which each car's physics have been determined should present a platter of vehicles to suit every level of mastery. And what a platter – with almost half the complement of *PGR2*'s garage in the *Prologue* alone, it puts the final game's 500 vehicles firmly into perspective.

"EVERY VEHICLE HAS A MORE VARIED SET OF HANDLING DYNAMICS THAN IN PREVIOUS GAMES"



■ The backdrops were allegedly pieced together from between 20,000 and 50,000 photographs.

GALLEON

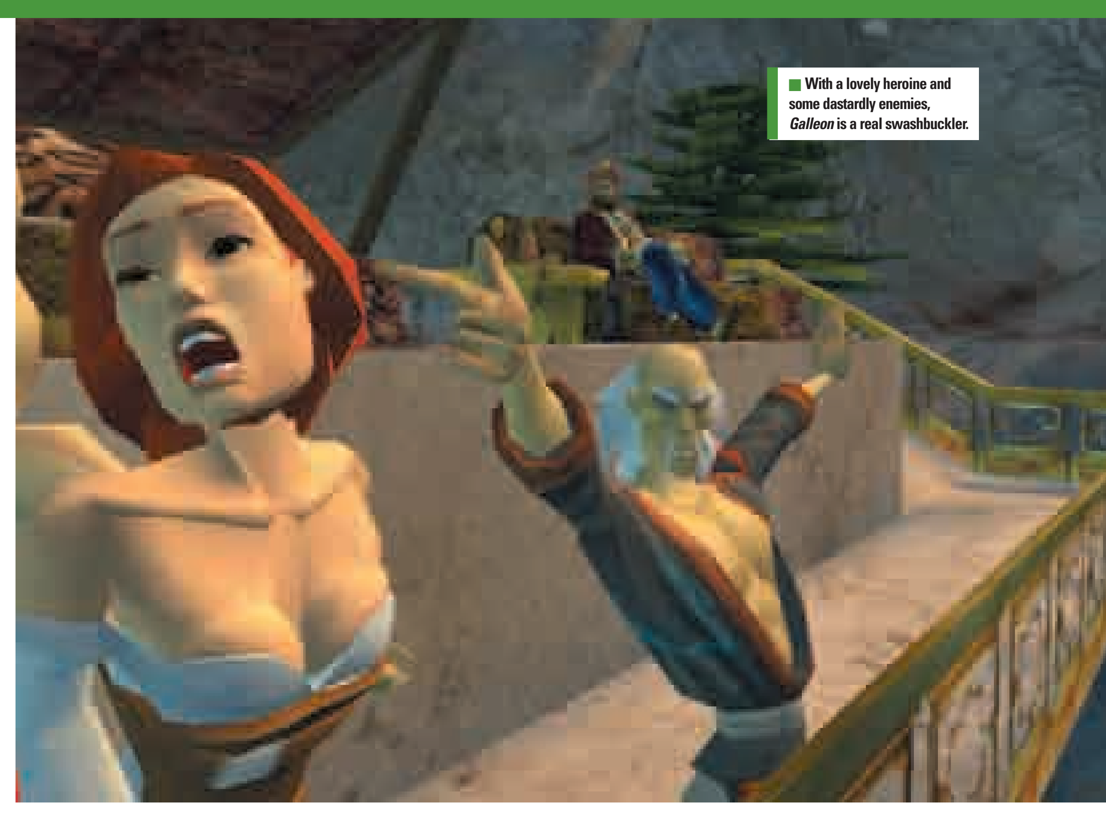
NO, WE'RE NOT LYING – GALLEON IS COMING OUT AT LAST

Your eyes aren't deceiving you – this really is *Galleon*; we're still shocked that we've actually had playable code running on our Xbox. Toby Gard's mythical game is finally here and, contrary to what the screenshots might suggest, first impressions are extremely favourable. It might look like Confounding Factor isn't pushing Microsoft's console to its limits – indeed, *Galleon*'s polygon-lite environments and spindly-kneed characters seem a world away from those impressive Dreamcast shots we saw so long ago. Watch *Galleon* in action, however, and you'll quickly realise why the developer has opted for such a simplistic style.

Drawing inspiration from Saturday matinee flicks, Captain Rhama epitomises the swashbuckling adventurers of old and shares more than a few similarities with Gard's leading lady Lara Croft. Unlike the rapidly staling *Tomb Raider* series, however, animation here is extremely fluid and is more like Ubisoft's impressive *Prince Of Persia*, especially when Rhama scales cliffs and runs along walls. And although the frame rate is rather inconsistent at the moment, SCi is confident that *Galleon* will be fully optimised by its May release.

Gard's main goal with *Galleon* is to make everything as intuitive as possible; this is being achieved by giving you control of the game's camera, rather than Rhama. It works in the same way as the Warthog in *Halo*, although *Galleon* features a further trick to ensure that your exploring is kept as stress-free as possible. While Rhama will always walk in the direction the camera is pointing, he won't drop off a platform or plank if he reaches its end; instead, he'll simply walk parallel with the edge until he can revert to his original path. It's so obvious we can't understand why no-one has done it before. Add to this an inventory similar to that seen in *StarFox Adventures*, along with some impressive cut-scenes that seem straight out of *The Secret of Monkey Island*, and the delay seems justified.

Of course, *Galleon* is still far from perfect – fighting, for example, feels somewhat clunky compared to the rest of the game – but it's fair to say that it's already looking far better than we ever could have hoped.



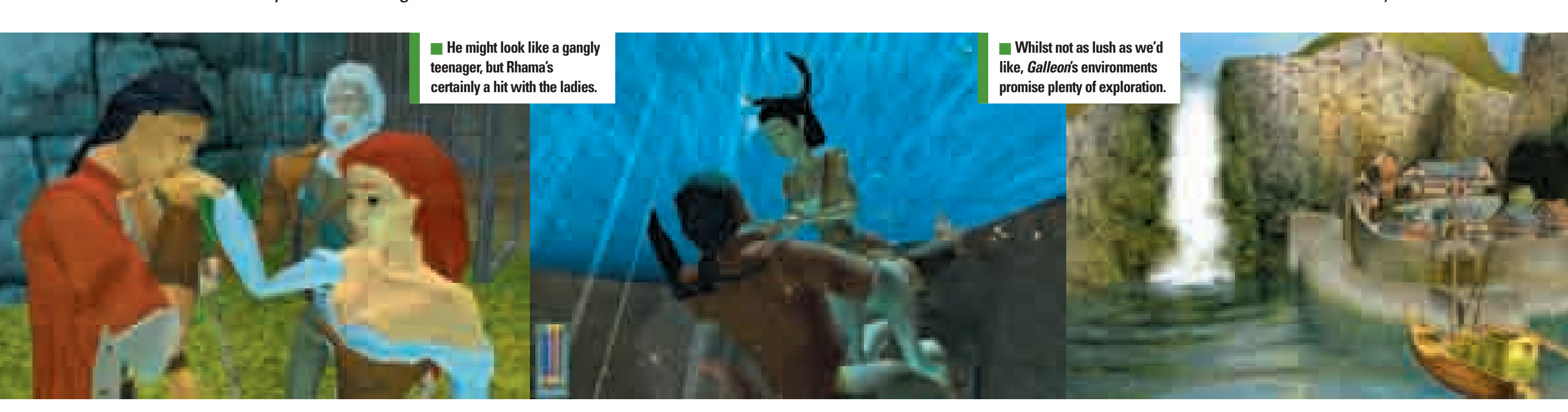
With a lovely heroine and some dastardly enemies, *Galleon* is a real swashbuckler.

"GALLEON MAY LOOK TIRED, BUT THIS ADVENTURE IS READY TO STRETCH ITS LEGS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Confounding Factor
RELEASE: May '04
GENRE: Arcade Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Toby Gard's much-delayed project finally gets ready to drop anchor and give Lara Croft a run for her money.

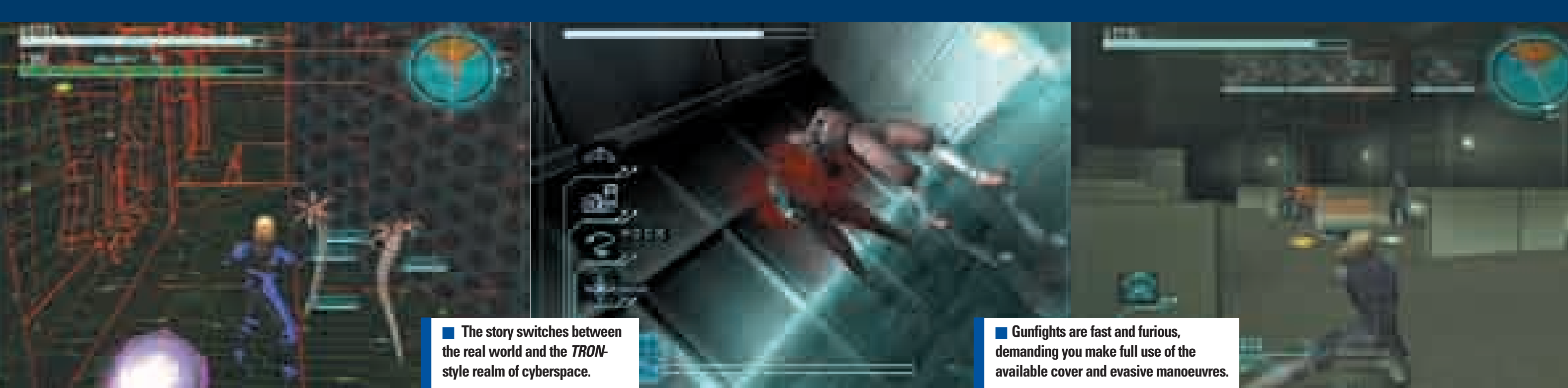


He might look like a gangly teenager, but Rhama's certainly a hit with the ladies.

Whilst not as lush as we'd like, *Galleon*'s environments promise plenty of exploration.


eMag

CY GIRLS



The story switches between the real world and the *TRON*-style realm of cyberspace.

Gunfights are fast and furious, demanding you make full use of the available cover and evasive manoeuvres.

TWO HEADS WILL ALWAYS BE BETTER THAN ONE

In today's saturated market, a new game can have a tough time convincing an ever-cynical public that it deserves more than the customary shoehorning into categories such as 'just another FPS' or '*Splinter Cell* wannabe', despite the inevitable similarities with existing titles. One of the common strategies for standing out from the crowd is to incorporate elements from a combination of genres into a title's gameplay, yet Konami appears to have taken the idea of defying classification to a new level with forthcoming action adventure *Cy Girls*. Rather than seamlessly blending gameplay styles into each other, or even switching between genres on a level-by-level basis, the game takes place on two separate discs – the first following the adventures of trigger-happy special agent Ice, while the second trades gunplay for swordplay in the role of martial-arts expert Aska.

Based on Takara's 'Fighting Heroines' range of action figures, *Cy Girls* takes place towards the latter part of the 21st Century where work has begun on creating a *Matrix*-esque alternative reality to combat over-population, and computer terrorism has consequently become a major threat. Enter a secretive counter-terrorism organisation composed of highly trained super vixens known as Cy Girls. The action kicks off with firearms specialist Ice taking the lead role, before the spotlight switches to Aska and her proficiency with a Katana. In true *Resident Evil 2* style these storylines are set to be interwoven, yet each will put a completely different control scheme and catalogue of special abilities at the player's disposal.

Ice comes fully equipped with an acrobatic repertoire of evasive dives and the versatile ability to make use of environmental cover. When combined with the impressive 360-degree field of control and consequent collection of multi-directional shooting manoeuvres, this delivers some incredibly stylish gunplay. What's more, in addition to their adventures in the real world, both characters will also need to pay an occasional visit to the *TRON*-style virtual realm over the course of their travels where more special skills can be downloaded to their digitised form, making for further gameplay variation.

Although we didn't get to sample the delights of Aska's hand-to-hand combat dynamics, the relative depth to the shoot-'em-up portion of play shows plenty of promise and hints that *Cy Girls* really could provide players with two reasonably comprehensive games in one.

"EACH CHARACTER PUTS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT CONTROL SCHEME AND CATALOGUE OF ABILITIES AT YOUR DISPOSAL"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

With a shoot-'em-up on one disc, and a slash-'em-up on the other, *Cy Girls* serves up an enticing 'two for the price of one' deal.



Extraordinarily acrobatic martial-arts expert Aska introduces a very different style of gameplay.


eMag

RISE TO HONOUR



Will they ever learn? Countless hoodlums line up for a taste of the underside of Li's boot.

Jet Li lends his voice, physical likeness and unique fighting style to give the game a cinematic edge.

THOSE GUYS WERE FAST AS LIGHTNING…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

Jet Li takes the lead role in this all-action romp, inspired by the cream of Hong Kong cinema.

PS2 **Nobody watches kung fu movies for their engrossing storylines or inspirational depth – it's our incessant thirst for eye candy that craves the larger-than-life spectacle of martial arts on display.** So when news first reached us that high-kicking movie legend Jet Li was to star in his very own videogame, we were quite right to expect nothing other than a showcase of gratuitous action synonymous with Hong Kong cinema.

For what it's worth, the plot follows Li's central character, Kit Yun – the former bodyguard of a slain Hong Kong crime lord who finds himself caught up in a web of deceit as he travels to San Francisco in search of his late boss' daughter. Inevitably, this boils down to facing wave after wave of ruffians (all with a suitably inept grasp of the fighting arts) foolishly throwing themselves into our hero's path, only to be effortlessly brushed aside by Yun's repertoire of silky signature moves.

One press release beautifully describes the game's levels as being "based around the player successfully travelling from point A to point B without losing a life", yet while structuring is likely to be incredibly linear and reliant on set-pieces, this game's appeal lies in the prospect of recreating those mesmerising silver-screen fight scenes without doing ourselves a mischief. Jet Li himself apparently spent no less than two months roundhousing away in a motion-capture suit over at Sony's San Diego studio, providing the game's developers with literally thousands of inimitable Li techniques to weave into the combat engine.

In the game players will benefit from a 360-degree attack system that enables combos of up to five strikes to be dealt out in multiple directions – essential for taking out assailants coming from the front, back and either side in one devastating explosion of fists and feet. A good amount of gunplay will also feature in the carnage, with an unlimited supply of ammo and allegedly 'unique' slow-motion gun dive spicing up proceedings. With fights choreographed by Cory Yuen (Li's old pal from *The One* and *Kiss Of The Dragon*) the action is sure to pack a punch, but whether it all converges into an enjoyable game remains to be seen.

"WITH FIGHTS CHOREOGRAPHED BY CORY YUEN THE ACTION IS SURE TO PACK A PUNCH"



Along with the spectacular kung fu sequences, there's also plenty of explosive gunplay.


eMag



Hadoken! **Street Fighter II SNES [Capcom] 1992**



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NINJA GAIDEN

MICROSOFT SHARPENS ONE OF ITS KEY WEAPONS FOR THIS YEAR'S CONSOLE WAR

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Tecmo/Team Ninja
RELEASE: April (Japan: Feb, US: March)
GENRE: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

Fast-paced, gravity-defying ninja action combines with puzzle solving in a story that's as much about style and plot as it is about combat.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The last *Ninja Gaiden* game appeared on the SNES in 1995, but its key themes have been floating around in pretty much all Tecmo titles since then. In the same way that you'd associate, say, blood, gore and a fast-talking script with a Tarantino flick, so there are certain elements that are inherent in a Team Ninja title. However, each game seems to feel fresh and accomplished, which leads us nicely to the latest offering, *Ninja Gaiden*. Why is the prospect of yet another ninja game with the same antiquated character so appealing? Perhaps this is because the good people who develop these games, much like Mr Tarantino, have managed to pin down the cool of their genre.

KNOW YOUR GAIDEN

Live support for *Ninja Gaiden* has been on the cards for some time, but Tecmo recently announced that the game will try to go that extra mile when it goes online. In addition to the usual deathmatch and co-op modes, we're promised tournaments with some spectacular prizes. The overall winner of *Ninja Gaiden*'s major competition will get a specially made Katana sword, while runners-up will earn game-related goodies and entry into the Team Ninja hall of fame. Tecmo has kept famously quiet about *Gaiden*, but details are starting to trickle out, including the fact that, as usual, Europe will be last to get its hands on the game.

Ryu Hayabusa is back, and this time he's after revenge following the annihilation of his clan by the evil Vigor Empire. The plot is pure Eastern hokum – the sort of mysticism that creates our sense of reverence for Japanese games – and there are plenty of demonic, otherworldly characters on which to practise Ryu's martial arts. Several familiar *Dead Or Alive* regulars crop up, including the foxy, purple-haired Ayane, but Tecmo is remaining tight-lipped about the roles they will play in *Gaiden*. In fact, it's incredibly keen to stress that the new *Gaiden* will speak for itself through its intense action.

Having seen the smooth animation, fierce combat and seamless transition between game and cut-scene, we're certain Tecmo has placed its emphasis on the game's main strengths. Ryu will have a variety of moves available to him – including wall running, swinging on branches and poles, and some particularly crafty stealth manoeuvres – placing the game on a similar footing to Ubisoft's dazzling *Prince Of Persia*. However, where the Prince was nimble around the dungeon areas, he was somewhat limited in the fighting department, which is where *Ninja Gaiden* excels.

Ryu will have a large variety of close combat moves as he's always carrying his trusty Katana sword. In addition to these there will be a number of stealth kills (probably along the lines of those found in the *Tenchu* games) and several ranged weapons, including shurikens and a longbow. Magic will play a large part in Ryu's arsenal, and we've already seen him using fireballs to blow away some unfortunate enemy warriors. Any amateur Bruce Lees will also be pleased to note that Ryu comes across a pair of nunchaku during the game and, by the looks of things, he knows how to use them.

However, all the simple combat systems and impressive weapons in the game would be for nothing if *Ninja Gaiden* actually looked like the Xbox's Bruce Lee game. One thing that's almost guaranteed from a Team Ninja title is spectacular graphics, and anyone who bought *Dead Or Alive XBV* will be aware that in terms of visual impact there are no better games on the console. As the screenshots show, the world of *Ninja Gaiden* and its inhabitants have been painstakingly rendered to make full use of the Xbox's superior power.

Gaiden already blends lavish visuals with smooth, intense action, and Tecmo has delayed the game for an extra three months to make sure it's perfect. Can you afford not to be excited about a game that's had so much dedication and care ploughed into it?

"NINJA GAIDEN'S ENVIRONMENTS AND INHABITANTS HAVE BEEN PAINSTAKINGLY RENDERED TO MAKE FULL USE OF THE XBOX'S SUPERIOR POWER"



A range of typical ninja weapons are featured, including swords, nunchaku and shurikens.

NINJA GAIDEN
XBOX



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Anyone who remembers the *Ninja Gaiden* trilogy from its SNES days (or even further back in Eighties arcades) might be aware that it was developed by a group called Team Ninja. Having worked through the decades with the *Dead Or Alive* games, Team Ninja is back to make a current-generation *Ninja Gaiden* game.

HISTORY

- **PROJECT ZERO** 2002 [Xbox]
- **DOA: XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL** 2002 [Xbox]
- **DEAD OR ALIVE 3** 2001 [Xbox]

"NINJA GAIDENWILL RAISE THE BAR IN ACTION ADVENTURE GAMES"

JOHN INADA, DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, TECMO

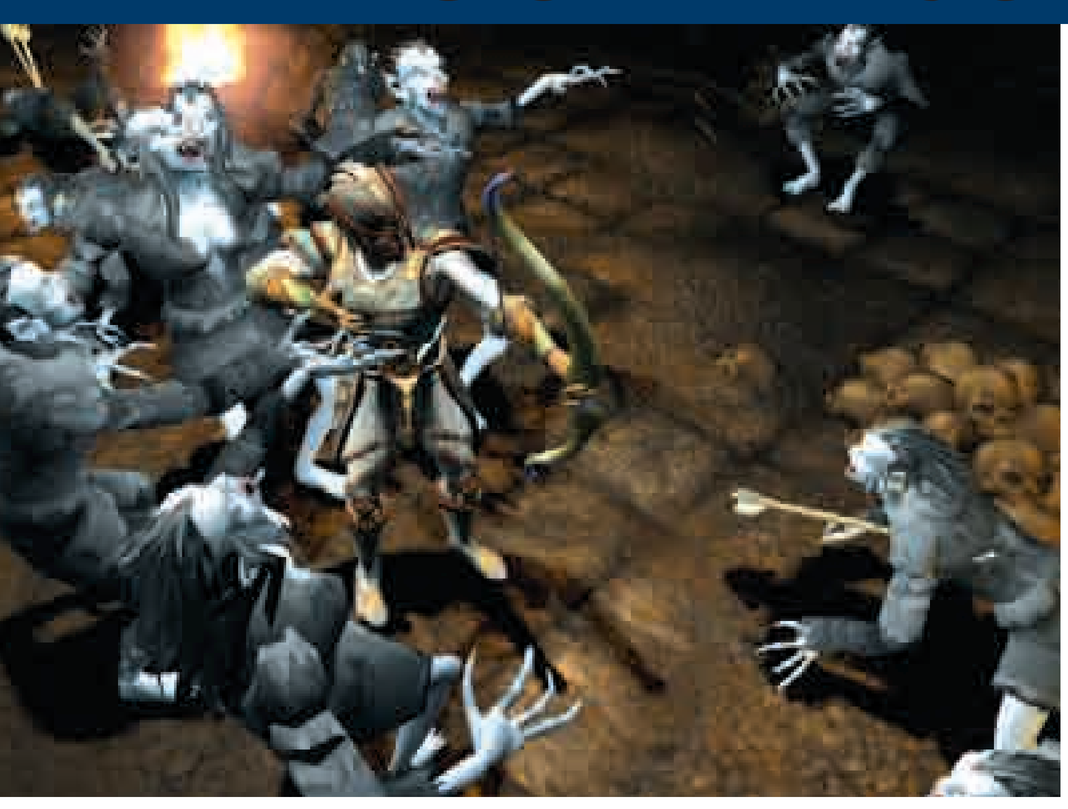
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HOT NINJA-ON-EVIL-THINGS ACTION

YOJIMBO + BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER x XBOX LIVE = NINJA GAIDEN

■ It's not uncommon to take on multiple enemies at once, resulting in some truly mammoth combos.

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST



PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF BORROWING TO A NEW LEVEL

DETAILS
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Snowblind Studios
RELEASE: March '04
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ The *EverQuest* world leaves its MMORPG home to settle near *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*...

The concept of originality is one that's sometimes lost on the games industry. Appropriately, this trend is nothing new either – cashing in on someone else's good idea has been going on for years, though some publishers have been more obvious about it than others (EA's *Simpsons Road Rage*, Activision's *Call Of Duty* and Midway's *Roadkill* spring to mind). But is it really plagiarism if a developer makes a game for one publisher, then makes practically the same game for another?

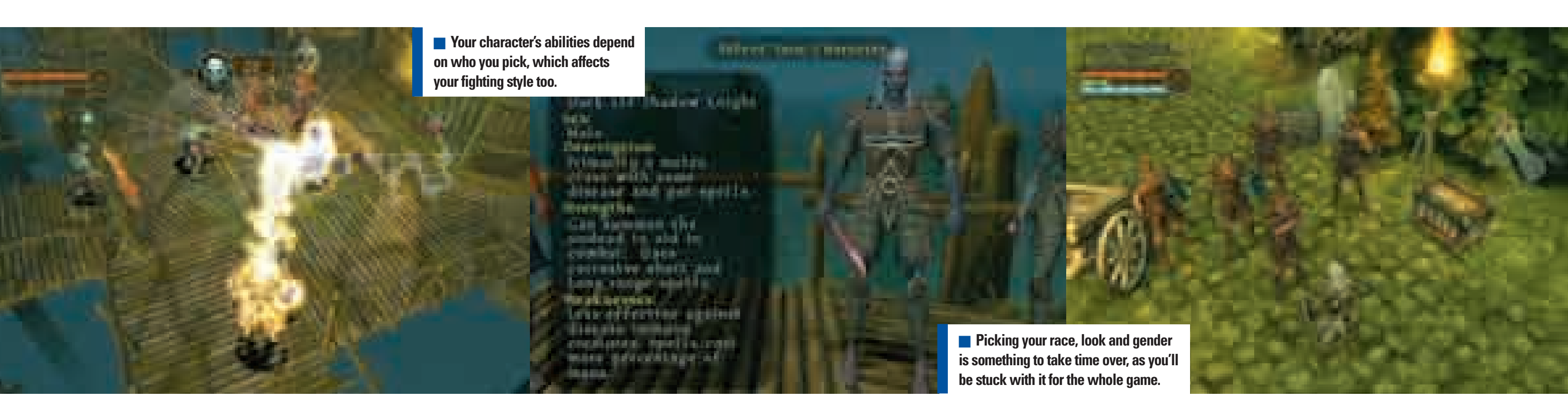
Having created *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* for Interplay, it seems fitting that Snowblind Studios should now develop *Champions Of Norrath* for Sony Online Entertainment – a remarkably similar game, but using the hugely popular world of *EverQuest* as its foundation rather than a D&D-based realm. As such, many people will be familiar with what *Champions* has to offer, both in terms of setting and gameplay; not a bad thing, considering the size of the fanbase for both.

Ultimately, *Champions* is a distinctly different style of game to what *EverQuest* fans will be used to. Shedding its massively-multiplayer elements for a more confining four-player adventure – either through a multi-tap or online – *Champions* focuses heavily on party-oriented action with a story-driven base, although it does attempt to retain many of its RPG roots.

> "DESPITE LOOKING LIKE ITS NEAREST RIVAL, CHAMPIONS IS SHAPING UP TO BE A SOLID ATTEMPT AT THE GENRE"

For instance, amassing experience lets you level up your hero and build their attributes, which vary drastically depending on who you pick; Barbarians, for instance, have strength-heavy stats while Wizards and Shadow Knights favour magic abilities. Your character choice also determines your skill tree, which can be used when you level up to gain new abilities and is particularly useful for creating a unique hero, as you can choose which route through the tree you take.

With its randomly generated maps, thousands of weapon and armour types, and five chapters offering around 20 hours of gameplay, *Champions* looks to be a solid attempt at taking *EverQuest* in a new direction. Of course, the fact that it's going up against *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* – a game that, to the untrained eye, looks almost identical in every way – could be a problem, but we suspect that the *EverQuest* brand could be enough to make this one popular regardless.



■ Your character's abilities depend on who you pick, which affects your fighting style too.

■ Picking your race, look and gender is something to take time over, as you'll be stuck with it for the whole game.


eMag

WORLD OF WARCRAFT



Mingle with thousands of other players in the bustling cities, or venture into the lonely wilds outside.

"WE ARE CREATING AN INCREDIBLY DYNAMIC ONLINE EXPERIENCE WITH ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES TO SURPRISE AND ENGROSS"

MIKE MORHAIME, PRESIDENT, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EXPLORE THE WORLD BEHIND THE WAR

WARCRAFT III - ARMIES x EVERQUEST = WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Although you can't control the Gryphon yourself, it's still a great way to see the sights.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PC/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Blizzard Entertainment was founded in 1991 by Allen Adham, Michael Morhaime and Frank Pearce under the name of Silicon & Synapse. Nowadays the company is part of the Vivendi group with the likes of the *Warcraft*, *Starcraft* and *Diablo* series among its impressive portfolio of bestsellers.

HISTORY

- **WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS** 2002 [PC]
- **STARCRAFT** 1998 [PC]
- **WARCRAFT** 1994 [PC]



■ Characters can expand on their basic capabilities by learning hundreds of impressive skills.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Mac
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Blizzard
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '04
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

■ Trading real-time battles for epic adventuring, step inside the *Warcraft* universe as you've never seen it before.

BLIZZARD TAKES THE WARCRAFT FRANCHISE INTO A WORLD OF ITS OWN

News of Blizzard's plans to create a persistent online RPG using the *Warcraft* universe as a backdrop first surfaced back in 2001 to an understandably enthused reception from the benchmark RTS title's immense fanbase. Now, finally, after whetting our appetites with a strong showing at both E3 2002 and 2003, the end is 'almost' in sight as the development team prepares to put the finishing touches to the colossal game world. Ironically, one of the all-time MMORPG greats, *EverQuest*, recently made precisely the opposite transition between the genres with lacklustre strategy romp *Lords Of Everquest*, begging the question of whether extending the *Warcraft* franchise would also turn out to be another unjust exploitation of its guaranteed profitability.

Thankfully, from what we've seen of Blizzard's epic *World Of Warcraft* project thus far, not only has every effort been made to take full advantage of the series' established legacy, but ambitious goals in terms of scale and content look set to ensure the finished product mounts a serious challenge on the genre's very finest. Well over eight million copies of *Warcraft* games have flown off the shelves since the acclaimed saga began back in 1994, and those familiar with the series will appreciate how all the character races, locales and historical events from previous games have been consistently woven into the world's design.

This game is set some four years after the events of *Warcraft III* and not only features all the recognisable haunts from the continent of Azeroth but introduces the neighbouring lands of Kalimdor – home of the Night Elves – and the Undead-infested isle of Lordaeron to flesh out the fantastically diverse range of scenery. The isolated Dwarven stronghold of Iron Forge, for instance, can be found to the very north of Azeroth nestling among the snow-covered peaks of Dun Morogh, while many miles to the south lie the Troll-patrolled jungle ruins of Stranglethorn Vale. Somewhere in between, the bustling human capital of Stormwind provides one of the most densely populated cities in the game, comprising a number of varied districts linked by a network of canals.

Players can enter the virtual realm as a member of the Human, Orc, Dwarf, Night-Elf, Undead, Gnome, Troll or Tauren race, each packed with a broad spectrum of character classes. Every class brings with it a set of fully upgradeable skills and capabilities, which should allow players to experience some vastly different roles in the *Warcraft* universe. There are countless crucial roles to be played in the world's economy, from gatherers of raw materials to craftspeople able to turn these into useful items, while production of the more valuable objects will often require the combined input of a number of skilled professionals. The majority of players will inevitably seek a more thrilling existence, and *World Of Warcraft* delivers in style by employing a suitably action-packed combat system along with a collection of challenging quests to add context to your adventuring.

New quests, special items and monster types are set to revitalise the game world on a monthly basis, and while the very idea of exploring the lands of Azeroth, Kalimdor and Lordaeron will automatically reel in *Warcraft* fans by the dungeon-load, *World Of Warcraft* is intriguingly shaping up to become a serious MMORPG contender in its own right.

TRAVEL IN STYLE

Gamers will probably derive the most pleasure from exploring the impressive sights of the diverse environments of the game world. The size of the map, the seas between continents, and the countless dangers that await players in the less savoury regions of the world make travelling on foot a limited means of transport. Thankfully, you can reach distant shores quickly via ship, zeppelin or even Gryphon. Soaring high above the world atop these lion/eagle hybrids has to be one of the game's most breathtaking spectacles.

> "AMBITIOUS SCALE AND CONTENT LOOK SET TO MOUNT A SERIOUS CHALLENGE ON THE GENRE'S VERY FINEST"

DREAM MIX TV WORLD FIGHTERS



Never in a million years would we have predicted that Bomberman's bedroom would look like this. Cracking décor, though…

Fighting on a giant transforming robot? This one scene alone will ensure *Dream Mix* finds a lot of loving homes.

MARIO AND LINK VERSUS SAMUS AND KIRBY? PAH…

DETAILS
FORMAT: GameCube, PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft
DEVELOPER: Red Company
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: TBA
PLAYERS: 1-4

If this were an arcade game, it'd be called *Hudson vs Takara vs Konami Unleashed*. Stupid, yes, but it's that sort of game…

We've always had something of a soft spot for games that resolve classic pub arguments – well, the geeky and childish variety, at least. Capcom allowed us to pit Spider-Man against Wolverine; SNK let Demitri loose on Ryu; and even Nintendo has helped settle several disputes, proving once and for all that Luigi is indeed cooler than Mario. It must be true, we once saw it happen in *Super Smash Bros Melee* after all.

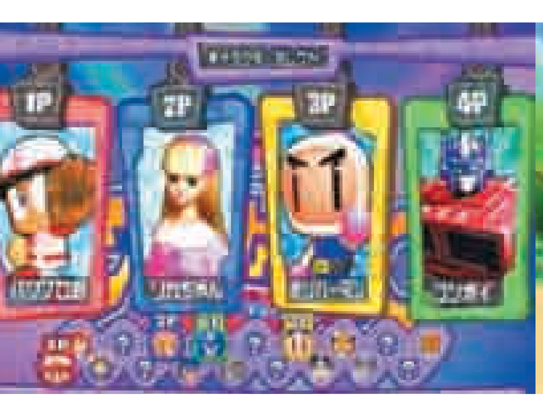
So imagine our excitement upon finding a game that offers players the chance to set Optimus Prime on Bomberman, or unleash Twinbee on a whole bunch of Japanese-oriented characters (whose inclusion is the main reason we're fairly unlikely to see a localised version of the game). It doesn't take a genius to work out which fighters will be getting the most usage once we get our hands on the game…

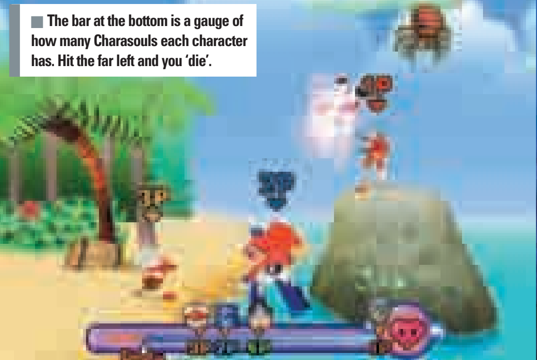
As should be clear from the screenshots that adorn this page, *Dream Mix TV World Fighters* (or *Dream Mix* for short) is a game that's clearly from the *Smash Bros* school of thought, and we mean this in every possible sense; from basic concept to gameplay and style, the whole thing is dangerously close to HAL's brawler. You're given the usual array of punches, kicks, throws and specials with which to pummel your suitably unbalanced opponent as well as – stop us if you've heard this one before – a slew of items that can deal damage or augment your brightly coloured combatant in typically quirky fashions.

Energy (or Charasouls in game-speak) is the focal point of the game, with players being encouraged to collect the representative icons of other fighters' lost health. Again like *SSBM*, much of the variety is provided by the selection of game modes and locales as opposed to the action itself, but then such is to be more or less expected within this genre.

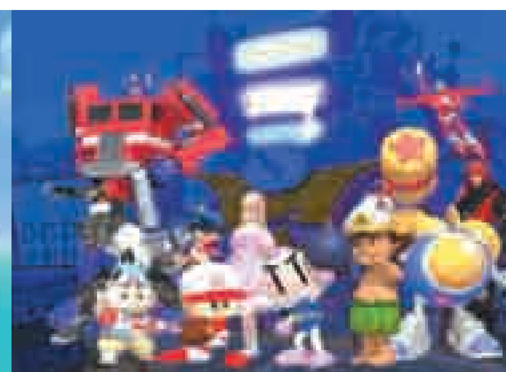
As much as we like the potential and what we've seen so far, *Dream Mix* is never going to win any awards for its mixed and crazy look. Characters and locations vary so drastically in quality and style that the game can easily end up looking messy at times. That said, whatever we say about the game won't change the fact that Solid Snake versus the ultimate Metal Gear (which, of course, is Optimus Prime, whatever the mecha fanboys might tell you) is a very real possibility…

"A PAL RELEASE FOR DREAM MIX LOOKS UNLIKELY AS IT'S ORIENTED STRONGLY TOWARDS A JAPANESE AUDIENCE"



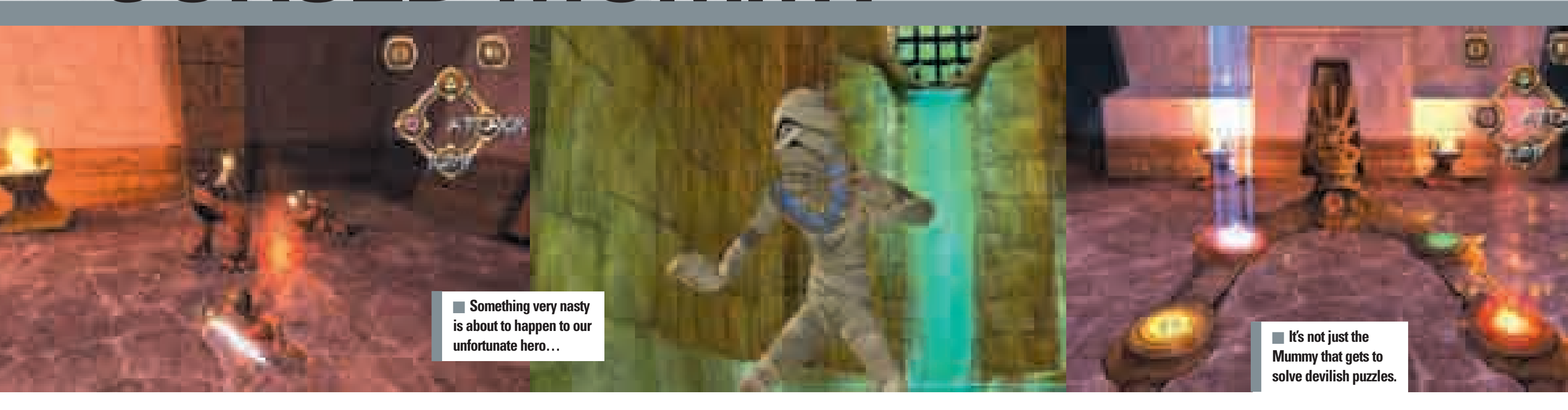


The bar at the bottom is a gauge of how many Charasouls each character has. Hit the far left and you 'die'.




eMag

SPHINX AND THE CURSED MUMMY



Something very nasty is about to happen to our unfortunate hero…

It's not just the Mummy that gets to solve devilish puzzles.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Eurocom
RELEASE: Feb '04 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Take a fantasy world and add two heroes. Throw in a *Zelda*-esque control system and voilà – a potential classic.

WHO DO YOU SPHINX YOU ARE?

PS2 **Consoles seem to have been over-run with platform-style adventures featuring cartoon-style heroes – whether it's *Jak And Daxter* or *Ratchet & Clank* on the PS2, or *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* on the Xbox, everyone wants a piece of the fantasy pie.** *Sphinx* has been in the pipeline for a while, but with the title confirmed as *Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy* Eurocom's ancient adventure is finally with us, and despite succumbing to various clichés, there's a lot of fun to be had here.

Sphinx himself is a pretty moody hero, always angry, always flapping his tail at anyone who gets in his way (yes, he's a man, but he seems to have a tail too…). Basically when this guy is in the frame, the game is more of a straight action adventure game. Sphinx has an arsenal of weapons at his disposal ranging from the obvious (such as his magical blade), to the much more interesting Capture Beetles – these can be sent out and then detonated when they get near the enemy.

Despite the emphasis on action, Sphinx has minor puzzles to solve but these are mostly left to the other star of the show, the titular Cursed Mummy. Damn, is this guy unlucky. Unlike the usual hero who you must keep out of harm's way, the Mummy must be used and abused in order to solve various conundrums. For example, you might need power to activate a switch and the only way to do this is to electrocute the Mummy and use him as a conductor, then sprint to the necessary area and complete the circuit. It's the same deal with fire – burn him and then you can light lamps later in the level.

Perhaps the Mummy's funniest routine is when he needs to get through prison cell bars and is crushed flat in order to become wafer thin. Being 90 per cent dead already, our bandaged hero can't be killed so you can throw him off high ledges and he'll just carry on – a welcome change from the usual missing-the-jump frustrations of the platform genre.

Control-wise, *Sphinx And The Cursed Mummy* is simple to pick up and play, especially for *Zelda* fans as it uses the same button assignations as Link's adventures. In fact, Sony adventure fans should be rejoicing as this may be the closest they get to Miyamoto's classics on their machine. This looks set to be both funny and challenging, and we'll soon know if it's cursed or blessed…

Yes, Sphinx is a man with a tail. It's best not to argue, there's no telling these ancient beings.

"A NICE CHANGE FROM THE USUAL MISSING-THE-JUMP FRUSTRATIONS OF THE GENRE"


eMag

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: ANNIVERSARY EDITION

MORE 2D BEAT-'EM-UP ACTION THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A BLOODIED FIST AT

Has it really been 15 years since Capcom redefined the beat-'em-up genre with what has become perhaps the most exploited licence in history? That would seem to be the case, although it does mean that we've led misspent youths. After all, why can we easily recall the moment we first had a chance to play *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* on the SNES (in a darkened room with a bunch of mates, all trying to decipher the Japanese manual and perform Dragon Punches without much success) when we can't remember things like birthdays, anniversaries and, more importantly, deadlines?

Sadly, not everyone will have had the pleasure of seeing how far *Street Fighter* has come (or, in the case of games like *Street Fighter EX*, been dragged through several hedges) since the beginning, which is why Capcom's decision to create *Hyper Street Fighter II* is one that pleases us greatly. But it's not just because it's a chance to experience the joys of old-school beat-'em-up action again, complete with all the nuances, strategies and potential bragging rights contained within.

What makes *HSFII* unique is that it's an all-encompassing representation of the defining moments of *Street Fighter II*'s history – from the release of *The World Warrior* through to the introduction of the now-commonplace Super mode in *Super Street Fighter II X* – in a single game. This isn't one disc with five different games on it, you understand – we're talking one game, with all the elements of *World Warrior*, *Dash* (*Champion*) *Edition*, *Turbo*, *Super* and *Super X* in it, as well as loads of gallery art, ending movies and everything else the budding *Street Fighter* enthusiast would ever need. It's so simple, it's genius; we can't help wondering why it's never been done before.

What *HSFII* boils down to is a purist's idea of how collections should be handled. With everyone having their favourite versions of the early *Street Fighter II* games, *HSFII* gives you the option to prove that your preference is best. *Dash Edition*'s Ken against *Super*'s Ryu? The stupidly powerful Bison from *Turbo* versus his weaker *Super X* descendant? The original Chun-Li against newcomer Cammy? It's all possible – all you have to do is pick your game before choosing your character. While you can obviously play against the computer, the main focus here is definitely on multiplayer action, and having experienced several bouts on the preview code, we predict there'll be plenty of hard-fought battles between beat-'em-up aficionados when the game comes out.

Not surprisingly, *HSFII* is the perfect way for newcomers to the series to acquaint themselves with how beat-'em-ups used to be. However, it's also clear that the game has been made with a particular audience in mind; according to Kenji Itsuno, *HSFII*'s producer, the development team (consisting of many people from the original *Street Fighter II* team) "wanted to do something for the fans, but wanted to do it right." Short of a few niggles that we hope are ironed out for the PAL release – like the computer always picking the *Super X* characters during single-player battles – it certainly seems like everything's been done properly, with more collectable bells and whistles than you could ever need being added on top of the classic action.

We hope that today's gamers appreciate that such a thing needs to celebrated, rather than being left on the shelf in favour of *Generic Action Game #53*.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '04 (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

It's the ultimate edition of *Street Fighter II* with not one but five versions of the game.

THE TOTAL PACKAGE

With the Japanese release of *Hyper Street Fighter II* having all the signs of being a collector's dream in terms of extras, it'll be interesting to see how much of the celebratory package makes it to our shores. It goes without saying that all the art, ending movies and other goodies included in the game itself will remain intact, but we're more concerned about the inclusion of the 1994 anime movie packaged with the game, the release of the official fifteenth anniversary soundtrack CD (which has apparently sold like hot cakes in Japan), and whether the separate DVD cataloguing all the strategies and techniques for the games over the years will ever come out over here. We can but hope…

"THINK OF IT AS THE BIBLE OF CAPCOM'S UBIQUITOUS FIGHTING SERIES – EVERYTHING YOU'LL EVER NEED IN ONE GAME"

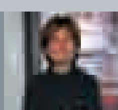


The newer characters like T. Hawk never really caught on like the classics, but we liked using them just to mix it up a little.

While on-screen markers show your fighter's origins, experts will be able to tell from the artwork and clothing.

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: ANNIVERSARY EDITION

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



PRODUCER PROFILE

■ Despite being the lead producer on this celebration of the *Street Fighter II* series, Kenji Itsuno is a relative newcomer to the world of *Street Fighter*. Indeed, much of Itsuno-san's past work covers games that were only released in Japan, with his last project prior to this being *Auto Modellista*.

HISTORY

■ **AUTO MODELLISTA** 2002 [PS2]
■ **CAPCOM VS SNK 2** 2001 [Dreamcast]

■ Picking your fighter has never been more of a challenge – it's not just about who you are, but *when* you are…

■ Using the Super moves isn't nearly as satisfying as before, though that's because we've been spoilt since they appeared.

■ This anniversary edition consolidates *Street Fighter*'s position as the world's greatest 2D brawler.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT'S HARDLY ROCKET SCIENCE…

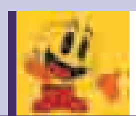
STREET FIGHTER II + MORE STREET FIGHTER II x EVEN MORE STREET FIGHTER II = HYPER STREET FIGHTER II

DONKEY KONGA



■ Clapping isn't the only way to rock the mic; hitting the drum sides or shouting works too.

■ Versus matches end with a pivotal roll. The player with the most hits at the end gets a huge score bonus.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Since Namco has a history of producing drum-based games (which are startlingly popular in the East), enlisting its services to make Donkey Kong's musical outing very special indeed was a wise move on the part of Nintendo.

HISTORY

■ **XENOSAGA EPISODE I: DER WILLE ZUR MACHT** 2002 [PS2]
■ **SOUL BLADE** 1996 [PSone]
■ **MS PAC-MAN** 1981 [Arcade]

MONKEYS, DRUMS AND MUSIC – WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

As limiting and gimmicky as they may be (or at least appear to be), peripheral-based games often end up being among the most enjoyable titles around. This is particularly true of the game's honeymoon period; for the first few weeks, the moving, shaking, shooting or drumming action feels so fresh that nothing can compare to the new addiction. The real test of such titles, though, is their lasting appeal – after the novelty has run its course, how likely are you to revisit these games? Precious few, we'd hazard. Thankfully, the dawn of add-on discs and downloads means you need never tire of that crazy peripheral you just blew all your pocket money on. Well, for a while anyway…

The premise of *Donkey Konga* couldn't be simpler; there are four motions to learn – left, right, both drums together and handclaps (picked up with a microphone) – which are mixed together to form drum lines that range from worryingly simple to work-up-a-sweat tricky. The first thing that leaps out is that many of the rhythms thrown at you simply aren't drum lines; this is no criticism as the patterns themselves are excellent, but we were expecting to play more accompaniment than lead. Once you get used to this, though, the required drum abuse actually makes more sense and, like many other rhythm action games, you often end up following vocal or melody lines.

What is undeniably impressive is the game's responsiveness – even after clobbering, smacking and sometimes throwing or dropping our bongo controller for hours on end, it still manages to pick up taps, slaps and claps wonderfully. The fact that hitting both drums together covers three of the four inputs is something of an oversight, although the tougher songs seem to acknowledge this with some incredibly devious patterns. Tapping the sides of the drum or even shouting into the mic can make for some very interesting renditions, although the lack of multi-bongo single-player action (à la Doubles mode in *Dancing Stage*) is slightly disappointing; something we'll see in the already-planned expansion disc perhaps? We can but hope.

The tunes themselves range drastically in quality, length and style. One minute you'll be tapping along to a jazzed up version of the *Mario* theme for a few minutes, the next you'll be battling through a brief but frantic burst of J-pop craziness. These are all available on Easy and Normal settings to begin with, leaving their Hard mode counterparts to be bought with the in-game currency. As if that weren't enough, all three settings can also be played on Cool mode, a rather taxing skill level that blanks out all the commands, forcing you to memorise the tunes in their entirety. Thanks for that. Dig deeper still and there are all manner of sound effects and mini-games on which to blow your hard-earned *Konga* cash – this is not a short or easy game.

Despite a comparative lack of flailing next to the likes of *Samba De Amigo* and *Dancing Stage*, exhibitionists will be delighted to hear that *Konga* manages to retain all of the embarrassment factor. This is largely due to the Eastern-oriented track list (which will, of course, change if and when we see the game over here) but this somehow seems to attract and entertain a wider audience despite the relative lack of physical exertion. Even without the promised extras, we can see this becoming a firm favourite.

DIG THAT 4/4 BEAT

The thing that has impressed us most with *Donkey Konga* is the excellent execution of the multiplayer modes. Rather than just being a cacophony of four would-be drummers playing in unison, the patterns play off each other perfectly – one player lays down the beat, another takes the offbeat while the other two elaborate with claps and fills. The drum lines for two or three players are every bit as good, and you can even take on a digital opponent if you're feeling confident. But be warned – CPU Diddy Kong takes some beating…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Namco
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Rhythm Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Once the preserve of beret-wearing beat poets, bongo playing has been given a facelift thanks to our old friend Donkey Kong.

"THERE ARE PLENTY OF SOUND EFFECTS AND MINI-GAMES TO BUY WITH YOUR IN-GAME CASH"



■ Multiplayer modes add new elements – roulette and POW blocks can wreak havoc with your scores.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM

Some of the architecture looks beautiful, avoiding the Lego effect of previous *Ghost Recon* games.

CAMOUFLAGED CLANCY SNEAKS BACK ONTO THE PLAYSTATION2

PS2 ***Ghost Recon* is a strange child, born from the gaming industry's morbid fascination with war and death.** On one hand, shooting guns in a game is seen as cool and much more socially acceptable than doing so in public, but on the other, a human life shouldn't be taken for granted. In its own plodding way, *Jungle Storm* has made war even more videogame-friendly but without degrading precious mortality, and soon the neat little package will be available for PS2.

Far more advanced than its Xbox cousin, *Island Thunder*, *Jungle Storm* takes the *Ghost Recon* series in a new direction. Whereas the first game was slightly less fun than watching paint dry, *Jungle Storm* is embracing its new console home by taking the bold step of emphasising the action and toning down the endless tactical map reading. In fact, with the reduced fogging, heavier action and improved hub, it looks like the game may start to broaden its appeal. Hardcore *Recon* fans needn't worry, as wider appeal in this case is a result of expansion and modification rather than dilution and a rap soundtrack.

The game is instantly more playable, largely thanks to the innovative voice command technology that made *Rainbow Six 3* such a success on the Xbox. Now, making tactical manoeuvres is a cinch, allowing you to fully embrace the team element of the game in single- and multiplayer modes (online or split-screen). *Ghost Recon* is a seminal online PC title and the gameplay that has occasionally seemed a little odd in single-player really shines on broadband.

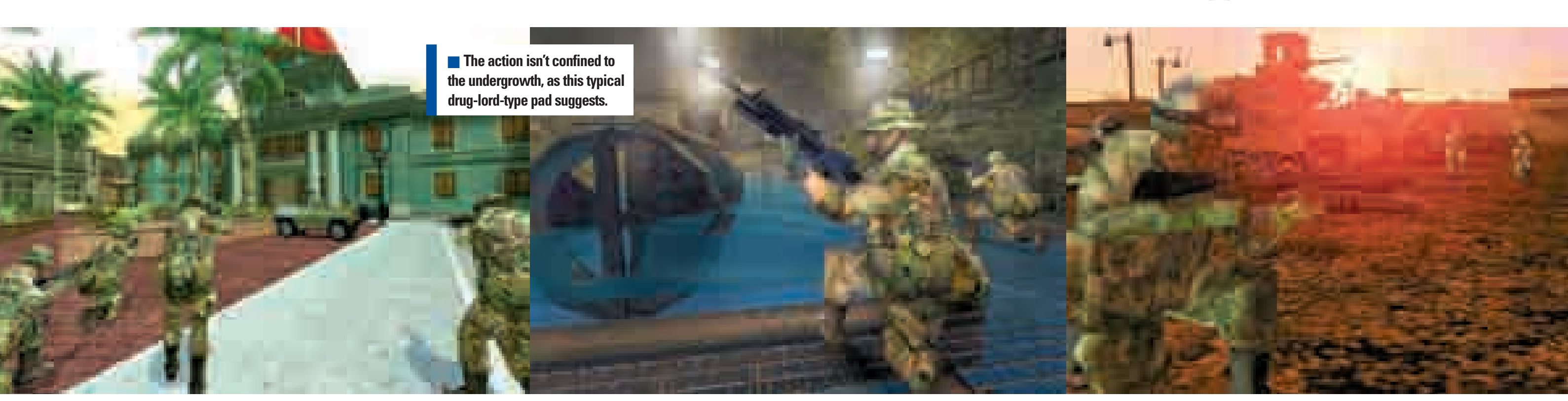
"VOICE CONTROL AND SUPERIOR GRAPHICS MAKE THIS THE MOST ADVANCED GHOST RECON TITLE TO DATE"

The vast array of modes and maps gathered from the original game, *Island Thunder* and *Jungle Storm* should keep the game fresh as players become accustomed to the heart-stopping moments that seem to ooze from every Clancy game that's gone online. And if you don't fancy trawling through the main campaigns there are plenty of quick battle options including terrorist hunts, tactical position defences and reconnaissance missions. This could be the finest squad game on your miserable little console, son. Do you get me?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Red Storm Entertainment
RELEASE: Feb '04
GENRE: Squad-based shooter
PLAYERS: 1-2

Tom Clancy team-based shooter gets taken to the next logical level – online and talky.


The action isn't confined to the undergrowth, as this typical drug-lord-type pad suggests.


eMag

PAINKILLER

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: DreamCatcher
DEVELOPER: People Can Fly
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (1-32 online)

Painkiller is getting ready to take on the might of *Doom III*. But can it succeed? It's certainly ahead on the 'flying body' quota…

THEY DID THE MASH, THEY DID THE MONSTER MASH…

What exactly happens when we die? Do we all go to a better place with free Xbox Live and unlimited arcade credits? Or does the spirit die with the body at that last exhalation? While this mystery has caused heated debate for many years, People Can Fly's explanation of the afterlife is much more straightforward and, unsurprisingly, features bloody big guns…

You've got to feel sorry for *Painkiller*'s hero – not only has his wife passed through the Pearly Gates without him, but he's now stuck in Purgatory. Of course, being trapped in limbo is hardly the basis for a classic title, so it should come as no surprise that a deal is soon struck with a passing saint in order to allow our hero access to both heaven and his wife. As fate would have it, heaven and hell are in the middle of a ferocious holy war, and with demons running rampant you've been assigned to clean the place up and hopefully restore balance to a troubled world. Achieve your goal and you'll be reunited with your lost love; fail, and you'll quickly end up as demon chow.

Okay, so the plot may sound rather trite, but this is a first-person shooter not a sprawling RPG masterpiece. Fortunately, People Can Fly is promising plenty of twists and turns before you reach the end of *Painkiller*'s 20-plus levels. The Polish developer is also aiming to deliver plenty of frantic gameplay, and from the early preview code we've tested, it would appear that it's staying true to its word.

Painkiller's world is a sight to behold and features some of the most stunning environments we've seen in a PC title for some time. Levels are huge, rambling affairs that exude atmosphere; realistic shadows, lashings of dynamic lighting and some exceptional textures should also ensure that *Painkiller* receives a more than willing audience when it's released in the next few months. Thanks to the enhanced Havok 2.0 engine, each undead death (and believe us, you'll see plenty of them) is a sight to behold – gargantuan demons retire with hideous exit wounds, skeletons soar through the air to land in undignified broken heaps, while masked attackers are violently hurled back by the velocity of the game's many weapons. Sure, we've seen this countless times before, but People Can Fly is taking painstaking care to ensure that its first game will linger in the mind of anyone who plays it.

Painkiller's gameplay is proving to be more than a match for its mouth-watering visuals and features plenty of frenetic action. While it shares many similarities with the average *Serious Sam* franchise, it's elevated by the sheer amount of enjoyment generated by racing around the well-constructed game worlds and simply revelling in all the wanton destruction you unleash. For instance, every defeated demon leaves a soul behind; collect a hundred of these and you'll temporarily gain the abilities of a fearsome demon, turning *Painkiller*'s lush worlds into a disturbing black, red and white image and allowing you to cause immense amounts of damage while moving at incredible speeds. Now that's impressive.

With so many games trying to offer as many different playing styles as possible, it's refreshing to finally play something that doesn't pretend to contain multiple genres and just wears its heart proudly on its extremely bloody sleeve.

FRAGGING FUN

No first-person shooter would be complete without an expansive multiplayer game, and *Painkiller* boasts several such modes. Light Bearer forces a single player to survive his opponents' onslaughts (though he can dish out maximum damage towards them) for a limited time. If he dies, play switches to his killer and game time extends by a further 30 seconds. Voosh, on the other hand, is more simple and basically involves giving every player the same weapon and unlimited ammo. The last addition will be a People Can Fly mode, which is a nod towards *Quake*'s Rocket Arena modification. Make sure you look before you leap…

"PAINKILLER'S STUNNING VISUALS PERFECTLY MATCH THE FRENETIC BLASTING ACTION"



There are 20 types of demon to destroy, and they're all as ugly as sin…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in Warsaw, Poland, People Can Fly was formed in February 2002 and consists of a team of 20, as well as several external contractors. Many of the team have been producing games for ten years, with their best-known effort being *Odium* for the PC.

HISTORY

PAINKILLER IS THE FIRST TITLE TO BE DEVELOPED BY PEOPLE CAN FLY

"PARTNERING WITH NVIDIA FURTHER PROVES HOW SERIOUSLY PEOPLE ARE TAKING PAINKILLER"

RICHARD WAH KAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DREAMCATCHER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BLAST 'EM BACK TO HELL

DOOM + SERIOUS SAM x THE UNDEAD = PAINKILLER

Painkiller is one bloody title; those of a nervous disposition need not apply.

The Havok 2.0 engine in all its glorious action.

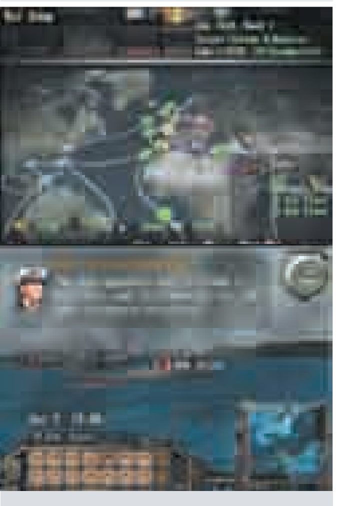
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

PACIFIC THEATRE OF OPERATIONS IV

SOON TO BE HITTING OUR SHORES

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Koei
Developer: In-House
Release: March '04
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1



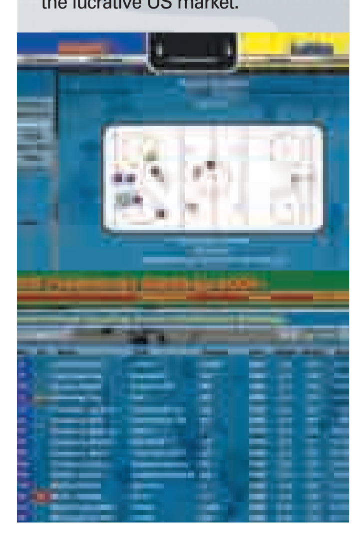
The PS2 is hardly the hardcore strategist's favourite hangout, yet Koei has obviously recognised a gap in the European market and moved to redress the balance with comprehensive naval strategy title *Pacific Theatre Of Operations IV*. Released in the US last year, the game allows players to take full tactical command in the great maritime battles of WWII through either a series of standalone scenarios or epic campaigns to conquer the high seas. With 96 ships, over 300 aircraft and around 50 theatres of operations besides the Pacific to host your real-time 3D skirmishes, you'll soon have more wartime stories of naval heroism than Uncle Albert.

EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER: FRANCHISE EDITION

BREAKING THE ICE

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: SEGA Europe
Developer: Sports Interactive
Release: Q2 '04
Genre: Sports Management
Players: 1-TBA

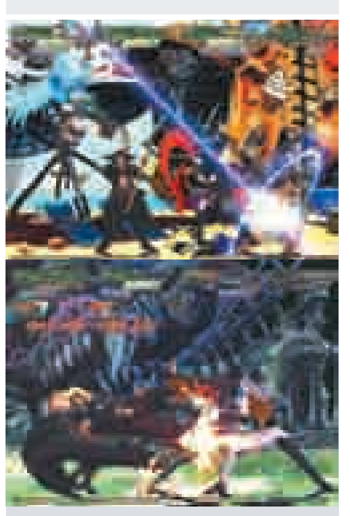
Following its much-publicised split with Eidos, the future is looking bright for UK developer Sports Interactive. Not only are we waiting with bated breath to learn what lies in store for the world's greatest football management game in its post-*Championship Manager* days, but the team has also moved to broaden its worldwide fanbase beyond the confines of football fanatics with *Eastside Hockey Manager*. Originally released as a Shareware title, SI snapped up the idea and went to work transplanting the game's vital organs with a modified version of the hallowed *CM4* engine that should unleash *Champ Manager*-esque fever on the lucrative US market.



GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

WHO HERE HUNGRY FOR COMBAT?

Format: Arcade
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sammy Studios
Developer: In-House
Release: TBA (Japan: Q1 '04)
Genre: Beat-'em-up
Players: 1-4



As much as we love 2D beat-'em-ups, we've yet to see any developers prove that the genre can work with more than two players. Regardless, Sammy's newest effort will be the single prettiest title to have tried doubling the fighter count as the hi-res sprites of *Guilty Gear X2* return to do battle in a slightly more chaotic manner than ever before. We're not going to hold our breath for a remarkable fighting experience, but with arcade link-up potential courtesy of the AW-NET system link, the fun factor could just save the day. Either way, we look forward to some crazy fisticuffs as soon as we can track down an *Isuka* machine…

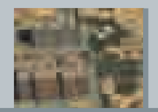
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM

BACK IN THE SUMMER OF '65

Format: PC, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: 2015
Release: Q3 '04
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-TBA

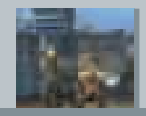
In FPS gaming terms Vietnam is becoming the new WWII, as more and more developers turn their backs on war-torn Europe in favour of the jungles of Far East Asia. The latest team bidding to recreate the infamous conflict are those talented minds behind the original *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, who are confident that with *Men Of Valor: Vietnam* they have the makings of yet another enduring military franchise on their hands. With the *MOH* licence now festering away in the hands of EA, and 22 members of the *Allied Assault* team now at Infinity Ward, the remnant of 2015 is hoping to take the gaming world by storm again with this brutally intense depiction of Sixties Vietnam.





CANNED – FALLOUT 3 (PC)

■ As acclaimed developer Black Isle Studios bites the dust, its work on the next instalment in the *Fallout* series has suffered a similar fate, to the inevitable dismay of many a PC RPG fan.



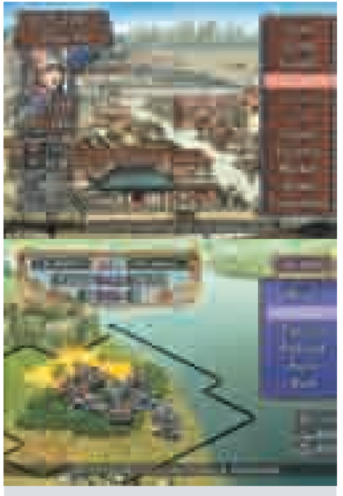
CANNED – LOTR: TREASON OF ISENGARD (MULTI)

■ The popularity of EA's movie tie-ins has forced Vivendi to admit defeat and withdraw its imminent action adventure (based on Tolkien's books rather than the films) from the release list.

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS VIII

LOVE IS IN THE AIR…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Koei
Developer: In-House
Release: March '04
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-8



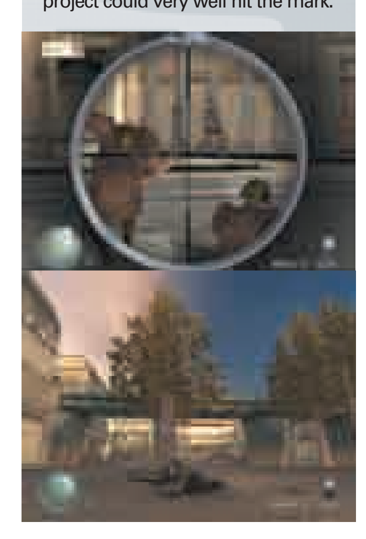
It may have taken seven instalments of the *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms* saga for Koei to arrange a European debut for one of Japan's most popular gaming franchises, but at the eighth time of asking the historical strategy series gets a PAL release. With its roots in ancient Chinese history, the first game appeared on the NES in 1985 and spawned the immensely popular *Dynasty Warriors* action series. The latest sequel serves up some 611 officers, introduces a host of new officer skills, and soups up the all-important combat system to provide European newcomers with the most wholesome and elaborate introduction to the series they could wish for.

SNIPER ELITE

SILENT BUT DEADLY

Format: PlayStation2, Xbox, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Wanadoo Edition
Developer: Rebellion
Release: Q1 '04
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-TBA

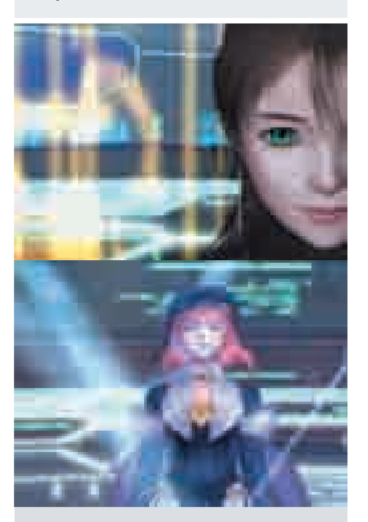
Any aspiring sharpshooters will no doubt be intrigued by Rebellion's plans to deliver one of the most realistic portrayals of life as an elite sniper ever seen in a videogame. Employing a modified version of the visually impressive Asura engine (recently used to bring the *Judge Dredd* universe to life), *Sniper Elite* recreates war-torn Berlin in the final throes of WWII. We follow the exploits of top German marksman Peter Mauer as he undertakes a series of missions for the Americans to earn himself a US passport. Featuring a promising amount of non-linearity and greater emphasis on the strategic aspects of a sniper's role than we're used to, this enticing project could very well hit the mark.



TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

ANOTHER STAB IN THE DARK

Format: Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: K2
Release: March '04
Genre: Stealth Action
Players: 1-2



The third episode in the *Tenchu* series caused a stir when it hit the PS2 last year, albeit with a couple of notable issues with the visuals and AI that prevented the game from achieving greatness. Encouragingly, the forthcoming Xbox version will not only showcase improvements to lighting effects, environmental detail and character animation, but also features reworked AI that should make enemies much more challenging to deal with. Two new single-player levels, the welcome inclusion of a continue system and, most significantly, Live compatibility for online co-operative and versus play, provide a much-enhanced package for Xbox owners.

XENOSAGA EPISODE 2: JENSEITS VON GUT UND BOSE

HERE'S TO THE FUTURE…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-House
Release: TBA (Japan: Q1 '04)
Genre: RPG
Players: 1

With much of the PAL market oblivious to the existence of the entire *Xenogears* legacy, there can't be too many people over here getting worked up over the release of this RPG sequel. Those who know what lies in store, however, will be chomping at the bit to get hold of this quirkily subtitled wonder. Solid RPG action and wonderful storytelling look set to take centre stage once more with the entire cast returning, albeit in slightly less cutesy forms. It's still very early days yet but a few surprises look set to lie in store. Trailers hint at real-time mech combat à la *Zone Of The Enders*, which would be a great way to break up the slow-paced adventuring if done well.




HI THERE!



HELLO, SEYMOUR!

Gosh, it's a potato thing that thinks he's an egg in boxing gloves… **Seymour At The Movies C64 [Codemasters] 1991**


DOES HE NOT LOVE ME ANYMORE?



WHERE IS THE LOVE?

STORYTELLING IN GAMES IS EVOLVING, BUT THERE'S STILL SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL MISSING FROM THE PLOT…

The lovers stand face to face. At last they are reunited. Nothing stands between them now and they embrace under a glorious pink sunset as the music swells. We pull away from them and there's not a dry eye in the house. This isn't a videogame, of course. Maybe it's a movie, maybe a book, but it's certainly not a videogame. For some reason, even as games designers the world over tell us that videogames are as relevant an art form as film and the written word, there are still no great love stories in the gaming canon.

We've seen cinematic presentation within gaming reach an unprecedented level. Squaresoft led the way with its lavish FMV sequences so real you could see the tears, and the industry followed close behind. More and more money is spent on voice talent to urge us to see the videogame characters as people, and licensed soundtracks are all the rage, helping to make products more contemporary. If it's real people talking, and the kind of music we hear every day, we know it's a game about our world. We know these games are about

cont. overleaf

Then suddenly...



Gabriel Knight-in touch with his femine side, apparently.

Were the girls in Fear Effect 2 really more than just friends

continued...

us. But, really, have videogames changed at all? Are they more human? There's still no digital Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler. No motion-captured Bogart and Bergman. No game has given us a moment that talks to us like the race through the streets at the end of *Manhattan*, or John Cusack's boom-box serenade in *Say Anything...* And yet, looking back at the classic movies and books that have defined their respective artforms, it seems that love is often a central theme. It seems to be love that makes us empathise with a character. Why aren't videogames carving their own romantic niche, and creating their own classics?

"Since Adam and Eve, men and women have changed the course of history through love and, of course, sex," says Anthea Kenyon, chairwoman of the Romantic Novelists' Association. "Think of Helen of Troy, Henry VIII and Edward VIII. It is always the human story which appeals to readers and viewers of films, videos and paintings, because love – however you define it – is always central to most people's lives. If you think about it, films and novels without a single moment of 'romance' are few – be it a touching scene in an animal cartoon or a moment in some sci-fi when rapport between two characters is either seen or sensed. It is the human touch, the whiff of romance in whatever form and however fleeting which we humans want in a story."

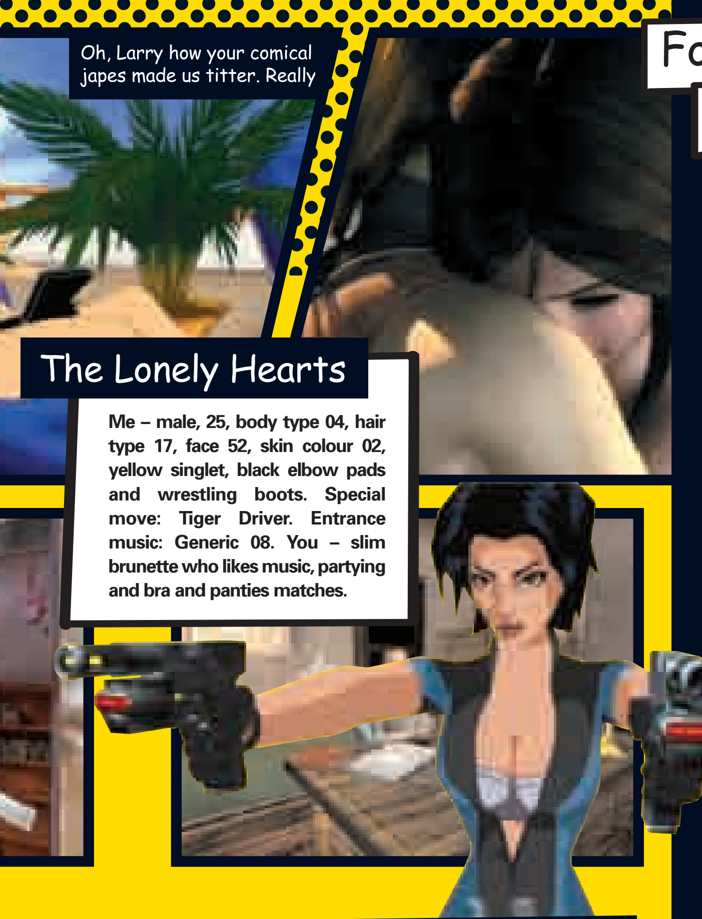
It's more difficult to think of videogames that feature a moment of romance. Even those games that do boast of their narrative are more likely to use the adjectives 'thrilling', 'terrifying' or 'exciting' than 'romantic'. It's a real concern for those designers who pride themselves on telling a story. Ragnar Tornquist is one such designer, and his award-winning PC adventure game *The Longest Journey* is widely acclaimed as the most accomplished of its type. "I very much want to create games that are about love – romantic love, platonic love, obsessive love, love between friends – because I believe that games, like all media, should reflect reality," he says. "We're all so very, very tired of alien invaders and evil wizards who want to conquer the world 'just because'. Injecting these narratives with real people and real issues will be the next great step forward in game storytelling. For games to become a topical, valid and successful form of popular entertainment, writers and designers have to look beyond the typically conflict-driven narratives of today's games towards something more mature – though not necessarily adult – and more human."

But are 'human' games what gamers want? When many of the best-selling games these days seem to feature carjacking, headshots and ragdoll physics as a rule, how difficult must it be to persuade a publisher that there's money in creating a love story, and with it a storytelling masterwork? Isn't conflict and tension essential in the videogame marketplace? "Conflict is still important," says Tornquist. "Games need a narrative drive that involves the audience, much more so than books or TV, which can be entirely character driven. Games need a plot. But a plot can be enriched tenfold by the introduction of 'real' characters, emotions and relationships."

However, Al Lowe, creator of the hugely successful *Leisure Suit Larry* titles, feels that the reliance on 'conflict' has been to the detriment of gaming's evolution. "The videogame will truly be said to have arrived when the public accepts it as a vehicle for not only love but all the emotions. So far we've touched on fear and excitement, brushed humour and pathos, and totally ignored everything else." In fact, Al believes that the videogame industry may soon have a rude awakening. "I suspect when a change happens, it will happen from outside the current gaming industry. The industry will belittle whoever is responsible, but soon discover that real people enjoy feeling a wide range of emotions."

The Lonely Hearts

Male, mid-30s, smoker (particularly in laser-filled rooms), seeks woman for friendship, quiet nights in and very, very long chats. Overweight and La-Li-Lu-Le-Lo should not apply. Contact me on Codec frequency 125.4



Oh, Larry how your comical japes made us titter. Really

The Lonely Hearts

Me – male, 25, body type 04, hair type 17, face 52, skin colour 02, yellow singlet, black elbow pads and wrestling boots. Special move: Tiger Driver. Entrance music: Generic 08. You – slim brunette who likes music, partying and bra and panties matches.

JUST FOR GIRLS

There is often the suggestion that a game with a romantic narrative would be seen as a cynical effort to get more female gamers to part with their cash, but is this just another example of the chauvinism that is rife in what is a male-dominated industry? Where is the counter-argument that a game about love could appeal to men as much as it does to women? Trisha Ashley is a romantic novelist, and isn't sure that there would be a great crossover appeal if the main theme of a game is love. "Because of a lack of strong female protagonists to identify with, we women often have to empathise with a male character or some wimpy female who runs around yelling for help and wringing her hands," she says. "We're used to it. But what about the reverse? Will men want to play our games?"

It's the perception of romantic games as 'games for women' that seems to be the problem. In the same way that many romantic movies are written off as 'chick flicks' or 'date movies' where the participation of a woman in the viewing experience is always assumed, there seems to be a belief that men would find nothing to interest them in a game with romantic leanings. "Of course love stories aren't just for women – that's ridiculous," says Tornquist. "Men like a good love story as much as anyone, we're just too chicken to admit it! Well-written stories about real people experiencing real emotions and real relationships will appeal to everyone.

cont. overleaf

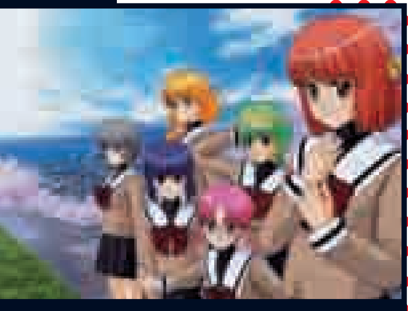
Forever With You

While we in the West are waiting for the first romantic game of any real note, the Japanese have long been enjoying the charming, idealistic and, if you don't know your bunkasai from your taikusai, often entirely baffling concept of the dating game.

Perhaps the most famous example of this genre is the fabulous *Tokimeki Memorial* series from Konami, which sees the player as a school student dating a wide array of girls, with love the only objective. The game is a merchandise machine in Japan, and no cosplay convention is complete without dozens of Japanese girls dressed as characters from the game. It's *Tokimeki*'s respectful treatment of romance that has made the title so girl-friendly, and the series recently celebrated its accessibility with the release of *Tokimeki Memorial: Girl's Side*, allowing the female player a chance to chase some romantic male ideals.

So could this type of game be the step forward that Western gaming needs? Would it ever work over here? Japanese gamesplayer Aya Matsumoto sees difficulties in a direct translation. "We Japanese tend to hide our emotion behind words, particularly when that emotion is love," she says. "Games in this genre are mainly advanced by conversation, so this subtlety of Japanese expression troubles translators. Then there is a difference in the romantic ideal. Japanese men love young, shy and pure girls. – the Western ideal may be different."

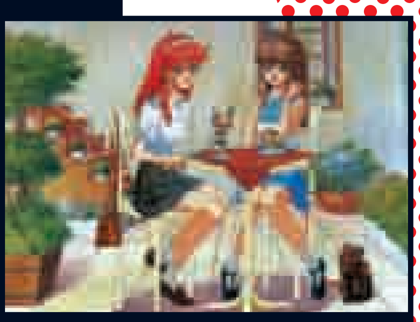
Still, while Aya regrets that these games could not be brought directly to the West, she's not convinced that this genre offers the romantic depth that gaming lacks. "You don't need to develop your relationship with partners deeply, because the game ends at the start of the relationship," she points out. "You just enjoy the process of hunting girls or boys. No argument, no sex. The game is stopped short of a kiss." And so the search for videogame love goes on…



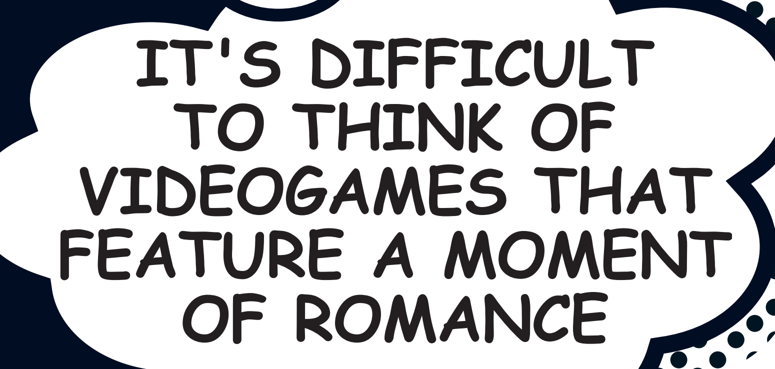
Can you believe this was written by the same man behind the new Castlevania?



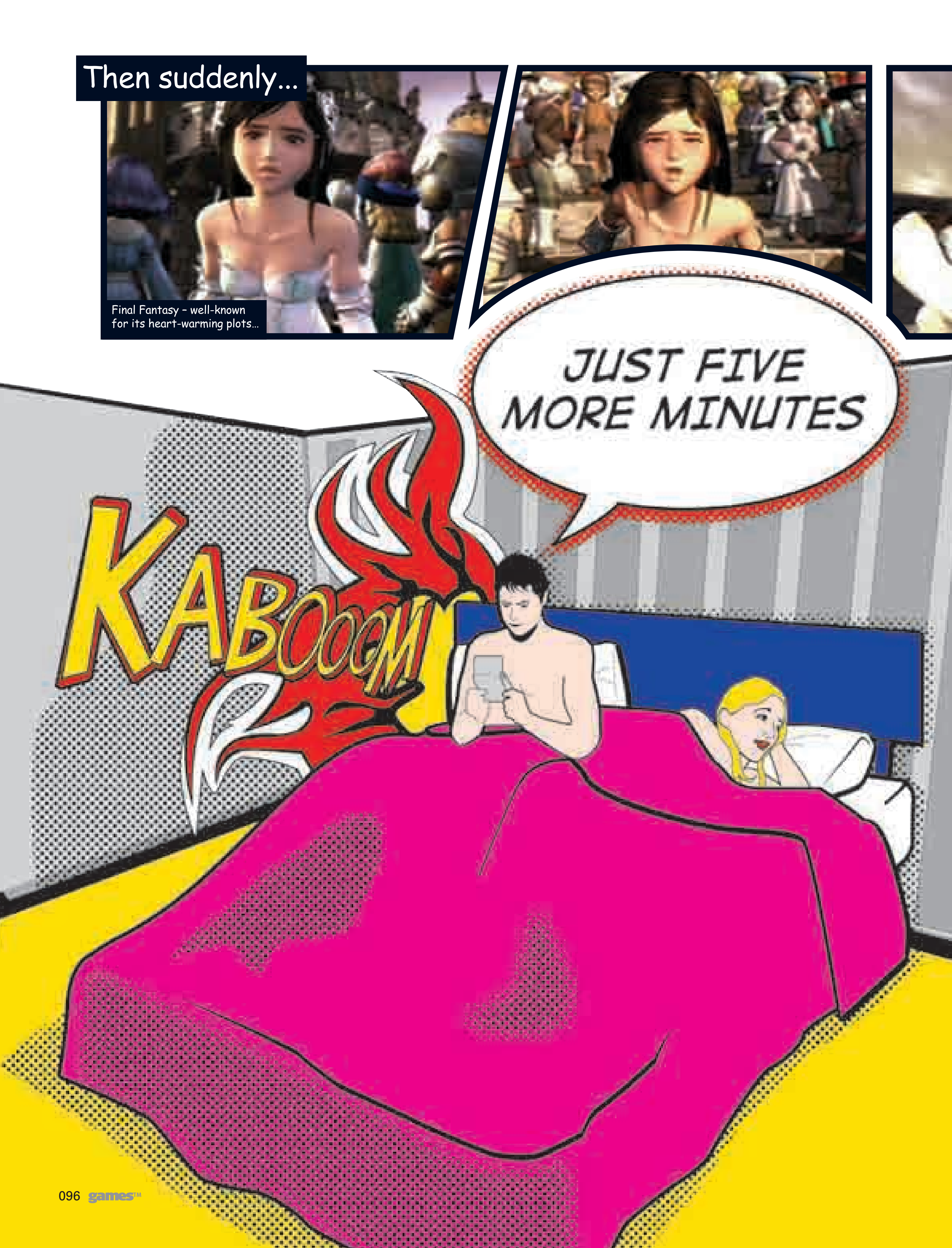
Are the Japanese insane, or are Western types just too hard-hearted about games?



Girls. In school uniform. Eating ice cream. Enough to fill a whole game? Oh yes.



IT'S DIFFICULT TO THINK OF VIDEOGAMES THAT FEATURE A MOMENT OF ROMANCE



Final Fantasy – well-known for its heart-warming plots...


…as you can tell from this rather touching scene. Ahh.

continued...

But, yes, romance will do much to draw more women into gaming, because most game stories today are very masculine and male-centric, even when they have female protagonists. Usually, these protagonists are not real women, they are male stereotypes."

So, it seems that designers are willing to explore the possibility of romantic games, or even games about love. But will the market allow it? This is surely all that interests the publishers, and it is the publishers that give the creatives the green light to push the envelope. Perhaps the best way to analyse the market is to look at ourselves. How have gamers evolved? Are we mature enough to appreciate such games? Trisha Ashley raises a pertinent point: "I get the idea that most game designers are young men designing games for young men. Would most men (especially young men) recognise romance if it came up and licked their ear, let alone be able to differentiate between sex and romance?"

It's a toughie. The internet is rife with webpages devoted to fan-art of female gaming characters in various states of undress, and it often seems that female characters in games are evaluated more in terms of their choice of clothing and wealth of cleavage than their contribution to the story. Games like *Gabriel Knight 3* or *The Longest Journey*, both of which featured women in understated adult relationships, didn't have many games forums alive with discussion about a step in the right direction. The wonderful *Ico* on PlayStation2, which offered the gamer a subtle and haunting study of the conditions for falling in love, passed un-noticed by most. And yet titles like *Fear Effect 2*, with its much-vaunted and, marketing aside, completely irrelevant lesbian relationship, had everyone talking. Perhaps we, as gamers, are doing ourselves no favours. Still, there is the argument that the publishers are doing little to change our tastes. We can, after all, only buy what is on the shelves.

"The audience is already mature enough to handle a romantic storyline, I think it's the publishers who aren't yet mature," says Tornquist. "Too often they underestimate the players and how they will respond to something new and original. I certainly don't feel alone as a writer/designer attempting to handle mature characters and stories; there is a lot of talent in this industry, but I think part of the problem lies with publishers who are afraid to try new things, and even with players, who should be demanding better stories and better characters in games."

MAKING LOVE

So even if the majority of the gaming market has expressed no interest in playing a game about love, if the publishers don't want to take a risk on anyone changing their mind, and the designers who would like to head in a new creative direction find themselves doomed to the development of a *Halo* beater or a *GTA*-a-like, where can we go for our love fix? "Romantic love is already a big part of one game genre – the online RPG," says Tornquist. "There, players can create characters of either sex and role play a relationship with a fellow player. Sometimes this turns into real love. And sometimes, I'm sure, players have been surprised – or shocked – to find out who their in-game 'partner' really is… But these games are about social interaction, not narrative."

Perhaps, then, it is in our own hands. The evolution of gaming as an art form might only come if there is enough demand for change. If, with the proliferation of online RPGs, there is a noticeable desire among players to romance each other, maybe publishers will turn an eye to bringing the offline player a game with the same objectives. As a knock-on effect, all gaming genres might be enriched. After all, what better motivation to deliver a bullet-time headshot to an enemy, ragdoll-physics style, than finding out he was the guy who killed the love of your life?

The Lonely Hearts

Bubbly female, enjoys dressing up and travelling, seeks male companion for galaxy-wide adventures. You should be fit, fun, with a GSOH and not intimidated by an independent woman who likes to curl up and shoot through your tightest gaps.

Gaming Get-Together

Time, now, for a real gaming love story; a story that helps make us gamers look a little bit more human. Glenn A. Rudy III is one of quite a rare breed – a man who found the woman of his dreams through a shared interest in gaming.

"I met Miss Yumi Makita while working my way through graduate school at Penn State Harrisburg's campus library," he says. "I believe the first time we spoke I asked a question about *Saturn Bomberman Fight!!*" Soon after this, Glenn was bringing a Dreamcast and a portable TV into the library for gaming sessions. "One day I hit upon a radical idea. Since she was planning a career as a translator I thought it would be good for the two of us to translate a Japanese videogame into English."

Glenn and Yumi decided to work together on tactical RPG *Wachenroder* for the SEGA Saturn. It was an intense eight months of hard work, hot flushes and stolen glances over the joypads. "I've often said to Yumi that I wish I would have known her during the time I spent playing and translating *Grandia*, because I believe that title to have the only truly meaningful love story found in a videogame."

While *Grandia* might have been Glenn's ideal courting game, the *Wachenroder* experience was life-changing. Yumi and Glenn started a relationship that is standing strong to this day. And their opinion on love stories within the games themselves?

"It is inevitable that more powerful romantic storylines will appear. And don't worry, Yumi and I will be on hand to translate these titles just in case they do not escape the island of Nippon." Isn't it beautiful?





REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score; we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know; if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you we'd be out of a job.



Boxes can provide cover or be smashed to reveal useful bonuses.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Acclaim

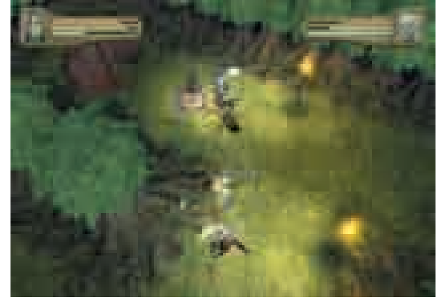
DEVELOPER
Black Isle Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
February '04
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

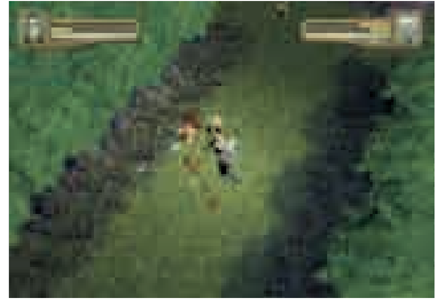
BALDUR'S GATE:



Foes can easily overwhelm you, but at least the environments are full of detail. If you're going to die, you might as well die somewhere nice…

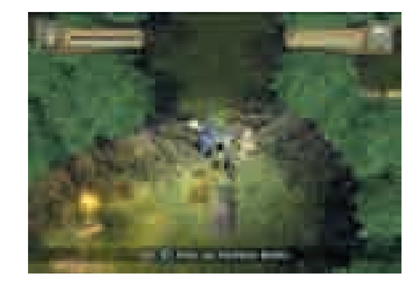


Like its predecessor, *Dark Alliance II* features some nifty lighting effects which really help bring the game to life.



The impressive game engine features many weather effects, including pelting rain, just to make your job a bit harder.





The ability to wield two weapons is just one of the improvements in *Dark Alliance II*.

FAQs

Q. WHAT'S NEW?
There are plenty of secrets to uncover, five new classes and the ability to craft your own magical artefacts.

Q. ISN'T BUTTON BASHING BORING?
Not so. You'll be constantly gauging your stats and abilities, and everything is tied together by a gripping story.

Q. WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE RPGS?
Don't worry, *Dark Alliance II* is an action game through and through.

DARK ALLIANCE II

STRAP ON YOUR SHIELD, UNSHEATH YOUR SWORD AND PREPARE FOR ADVENTURE

Videogames have given us a lot to be thankful for. Take Dungeons & Dragons, for example; once, we'd have sat around a table and listened intently to the Dungeon Master describing exotic locations and fearsome monsters. Twenty-sided dice would be thrown, statistics feverishly written down and much swearing would commence whenever we failed that all-important poison save. But now, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, we can put the countless stats and grandiose speeches behind us and get on with what we like doing best – hacking up monsters with whatever comes to hand.

After the console success of *Baldur's Gate*, developer Black Isle (now sadly disbanded by Interplay) was soon at work on a sequel. In the meantime, we've had the excellent *Neverwinter Nights* and the rather pitiful *Dungeons & Dragons Heroes*. So where does this sequel sit? Fortunately, Black Isle has pulled through and delivered a title that improves on the original in every way. Sure it still suffers from an annoying oversight (more of which later), but otherwise *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* is everything we'd expect from a sequel. Following on directly from the last game, our previous three heroes have mysteriously vanished after removing the threat of the Onyx Tower. Danger still threatens the city of Baldur's Gate, however, so a selection of new adventurers must take up the challenge and save the day.

One of the first things you'll appreciate is how much more freedom you have, both in terms of gameplay structure and how you level up your character. Having obviously listened to the complaints about the first outing, Black Isle has made the storyline a lot less rigid and allowed you the option of multiple routes through the game. While these don't offer the same sort of freedom you get in the likes of *Knights Of The Old Republic*, it's still a welcome addition and immediately raises *Dark Alliance II* above the simple 'hack and slash' formula. Feats have also been upgraded and you'll find a staggering amount of options whenever you level up your character. Balance has been improved and all five characters are as powerful as each other, regardless of whether they fight with spell, sword or fist. Some may bemoan the lack of a four-player option, but after seeing how poorly implemented it was in *D&D Heroes* we're confident that Black Isle was right to leave it out.

Unfortunately, whilst many of the game's original problems have been addressed, the most annoying factor of the original *Dark Alliance* has been retained. Once you've acquired your first Recall potion you're able to teleport back to safety and stock up on huge amounts of potions. When these start to run out, you simply repeat the process ad-infinitum; as a result, it's possible to sit through the game in one (admittedly long) sitting and this comes dangerously close to ruining the game. Fortunately, with five initial characters to play as and the typical *Dark Alliance* secrets, you'll still find yourself going back long after the main adventure is finished.

As far as presentation goes, the game is nicely polished, with one of the biggest changes being the impressive visuals. Detail has been upped considerably from before and you'll find yourself wanting to explore every last section of the game's many levels before eventually moving onto your next quest. The game's numerous spells show off all manner of fancy particle and light effects and there's a pleasing array of highly detailed and well-animated monsters to obliterate. It's the environments that really impress, however; whether you're exploring the blood-smeared corridors of a mad scientist's laboratory, or traversing the craggy and dangerous peaks of the Sword Coast, you'll be utterly convinced by the interpretation of the world of Faurun. The rolling orchestral score that plays throughout your adventure further enhances the atmosphere, elevating the on-screen action.

While the gameplay is practically identical to that of *D&D Heroes*, there's just so much more here to enjoy. It's still a basic button basher at heart, but Black Isle has skilfully managed to avoid any repetition and instead delivers an epic quest that will keep you going into the small hours – even longer should you hook up with a friend in Co-operative mode. With a huge selection of weapons and Feats to uncover, as well as the new ability to create your own items, *Dark Alliance II* is a marked improvement on an already enjoyable title. Now where's that +5 Axe…?



A WORTHY FOLLOW-UP THAT IMPROVES ON THE ORIGINAL

games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DECISIONS, DECISIONS: Rather than stick to a rigid storyline, you can now choose different paths.

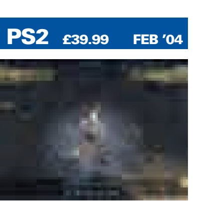
MASSIVE BATTLES: Enemies come thick and fast, so you'll really have your work cut out.



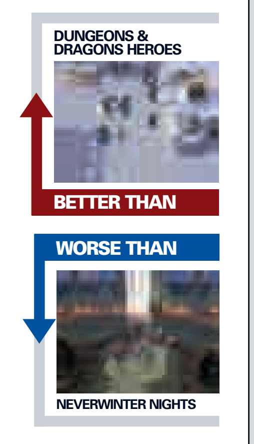
A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

Seeing that the original characters have disappeared, Black Isle has provided gamers with five new characters which with to liberate Baldur's Gate. A huge Barbarian supplies raw muscle, whilst a lithe Drow Monk takes care of enemies with her feet and fists. An Elvish Necromancer and Human Cleric cater for spell wielders, and as their power increases they start flinging around some pretty impressive magic. Last but by no means least is a Dwarven Rogue; not only is he a dab hand with a crossbow, he's also adept at sniffing out traps and other dangers. Each character has their own unique features and choosing the correct combination in Co-op mode is critical if you wish to survive the later levels. Add a selection of secret characters and the pairing possibilities are practically endless.

PS2 £39.99 FEB '04



There isn't much between versions of the game. The PS2 suffers ever so slightly from a sharpness point of view, but otherwise there's little to fault. Control on both versions is nigh-on identical, so it basically comes down to which machine you prefer.



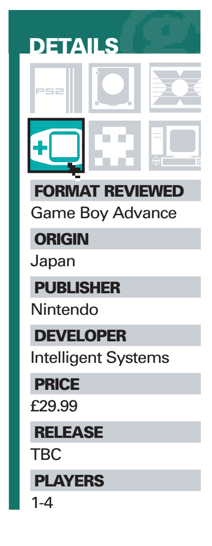




FIRE EMBLEM

ANOTHER 50 HOURS, YOU SAY? LIFE'S TOO SHORT…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Intelligent Systems

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
TBC

PLAYERS
1-4

When a character hits Level 10 or above, you can use items to 'evolve' them to a higher class.

Dear Nintendo,
As much as we love your impressive array of life-sapping strategy titles, we feel obliged to ask you to either slow or temporarily halt the release of similar titles for the Game Boy Advance, thus giving gamers a chance to actually progress through the existing library. With *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*, *Mario & Luigi* and *Advance Wars* (not to mention its all-conquering sequel) all vying for our attention, we're having enough trouble just putting down our handhelds let alone concentrating on something so trivial as, say, writing a magazine. As much as we'd love to exercise willpower, there are wars to be waged, worlds to be saved and monsters that won't train themselves – as you've probably guessed, we had plenty on our plate before even starting on this newcomer (to us, at least) that you call *Fire Emblem*.

Don't get us wrong – we've played your latest game at some length and were taken aback by the beautiful style and flair of the presentation. We were even more impressed with the stunning performance given by the tiny GBA sound chip, flinging forth tunes and effects easily on a par with your 16-bit console of yesteryear (a good thing given some of the competition, trust us) and presenting one of the first real reasons to buy an SP headphone adaptor. Thanks to excellent work all round by those fine chaps at Intelligent Systems (who we hope are now hard at work on *Cube Wars*), the look and feel of the game is one of undeniable beauty that proves to be much more than the sum of its parts. The stylish cut-scenes, wonderful battle animations and well-built, likeable characters… the gushing praise of the aesthetics could go on, but there are a few things about the game's structure that trouble us a little.

FAQs

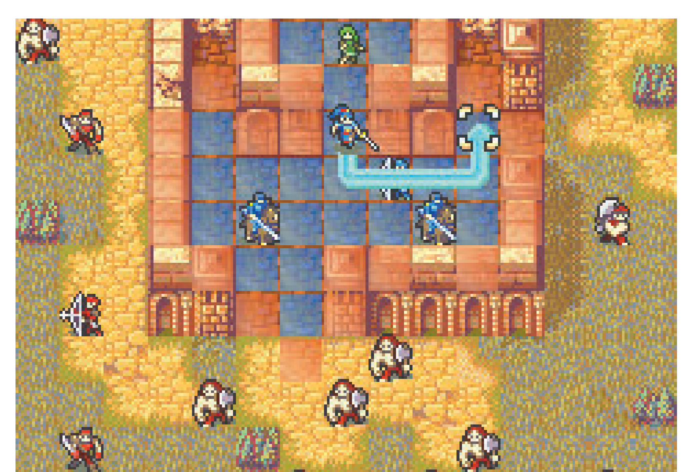
Q. WHERE'S THE REST OF THE SERIES?
Still in Japan. This may be the seventh *Fire Emblem* game but it's the first to leave the East.

Q. FREEDOM?
Very little, unfortunately. Maps are designed to offer multiple strategies but progression is very linear.

Q. CUSTOMISATION?
Not as such – you can give your soldiers a range of weapons to use but that's about as far as it goes.

You'd never guess that this was from the team behind *Advance Wars*…







THE SHINING

Since PAL gamers will have no real point of reference for the *Fire Emblem* series, allow us to draw a few comparisons. The most obvious would be to the *Shining Force* series – SEGA's glorious strategy franchise is simply begging for an update and this is the closest thing we've seen by far. Yes, we know *Fire Emblem* got there first, but for most gamers, playing such a title in Japanese would be out of the question. There are also obvious parallels with similar portable strategy titles like *Advance Wars* and the Game Gear's sublime *Crystal Warriors* but, ultimately, *Fire Emblem* is a unique experience.

Unfortunately, our dreams of formulating complicated battle plans and mission strategies have only been half-realised. While we've long hoped for a world map that allows mission choice that actively affects the coming battles à la *General Chaos* or, better still, the *Civilization* series (a long shot, granted, but now we've seen *Sim City* on GBA, surely anything is possible), *Fire Emblem* takes what can only be described as a step back from this ideal. Missions follow the most limited structure possible, and while the encounters themselves offer as much variety and choice as anything in the genre, they have only cut-scenes and plot events to link them together. Furthermore, units lost in battle are lost for good – semi-important figures will even reappear at key points in the story, almost rubbing in the fact that they can't assist you any longer due to whatever debilitating injury they sustained in the line of fire. Harsh but fair.

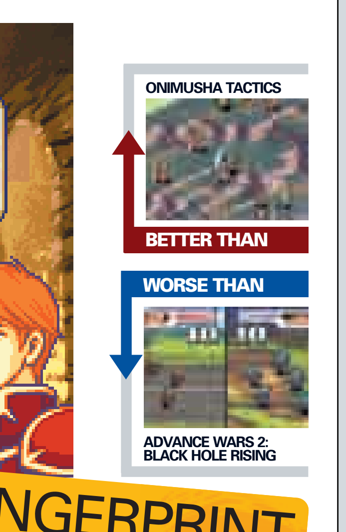
The battles themselves rate alongside the presentation as one of the main reasons to play this game; on top of the clever weapon triangle that governs which units (or more specifically weapons) are effective on others, *Fire Emblem* seems to sport more than a few unique factors above and beyond what its rivals offer. These are far from the factories that litter the maps of *Advance Wars*; if you want to expand your forces, you can do so by visiting the houses and villages scattered about the large areas to drum up support, where residents are often generous with their possessions too. In addition, we've been pleasantly surprised by the number of objects with which the player can choose to interact, giving options to break down walls, bridge gaps and open secret routes via the age-old art of hitting things. Great work all round.

Cut-scenes break up the action with narrative, hints and new abilities, but they never intrude.

As we have hopefully made clear by this point, it's not a case of us not liking this latest in the line of strategy adventures, more a case of enjoying it too much. For its few flaws, *Fire Emblem* rivals the *Advance Wars* duo in terms of addictiveness and style, only really falling short due to its straightforward approach and character mortality that will frustrate those used to more forgiving titles. For this, we thank you, but we do feel the need to reiterate our original point – we've now amassed enough strategy to last us for months and we'd appreciate a bit of a break. Can we recommend you release some new platform or puzzle games that we can pick up for five minutes between extended bouts of thinking? In the meantime, we'll just go back for a few more hours of warfare. If you'll excuse us…

Yours sincerely,

games™



games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MORTALITY: While defeated allies offer advice and story content, they can never fight by your side again.

CHAPTER AND VERSE: *Fire Emblem* relies more heavily on its excellent story than any similar title.



THE SERIES' FIRST LOCALISATION IS A SUCCESS

REMEMBER WHEN GAMES COST TEN PENCE A GO? NAMCO DOES

KILL.SWITCH

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

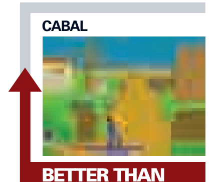
DEVELOPER
Namco Hometek

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
13 February

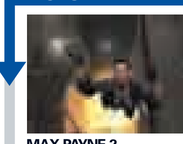
PLAYERS
1-4

CABAL



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MAX PAYNE 2

We've played *Dead To Rights* so we know all about games that promise plenty, then just end up giving you magic attack dogs that appear out of nowhere. *kill.switch* promises a lot too. It's not trying to redefine a genre, just provide you with a shooter where the word strategy is written in lower case. Then it teases you with great ideas that it's borrowed from other games and claimed as its own. Although, blissfully, the game has about as much interest in world politics as *Ikari Warriors*…

You are a super soldier, you are sent in to enemy territory (alone, naturally) and you have to kill every dink you see. The gimmick is that you use and abuse any cover you can find. Being a super trooper you can sustain a few more shots than your enemies and you have the ability to regain health merely by holding back your advance ('ello *Halo*), but get caught in a crossfire and you're a dead man. Great, we're playing a game based on a 1988 ethos. But there's more to it than that. By aiming with the right analog stick and moving with the left you can run and shoot. The trick is that you can also settle behind a wall, allow your crosshair to look past it and set up a shot while you're protected. Press fire and you'll aim your gun and, get this, shoot *without looking*. Fancy, eh?

This 'Blindfire' technique is used to keep the enemies' heads down while you dash in to closer cover to nail them with a killer shot (a hit to the head will kill them straight out while the body usually takes two to three blasts). Add to this your opposition's insistence on storming your position and their need to run the hell away from any grenades you throw at them and you've got a decent shooter that could well be seen as a combination of two arcade classics – *Cabal* and the aforementioned *Ikari Warriors* – but with a few *Rainbow Six* sensibilities thrown in. The end product plays as well as this conceit would have you think, but there are a few problems that stop it being anything but a near-perfect rental.

These days we need save points and sometimes we need restart points too. Hell, when the game calls for it, we need both, and that's what *kill.switch* gives you – in spades. Even though enemies have a certain savvy that gets them away from flashbangs and allows them to zero in on your position, they're not as smart as a super soldier who has learned their position and can replay the last five minutes of their lives in a *Groundhog Day* fashion until they're dead. This means that anyone with a modicum of skill will storm their way through the game in a matter of hours. Once you've done that there's little incentive to do it again and there's no two-player

FAQs

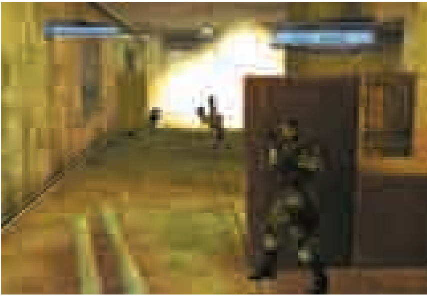
Q. CAN I USE A USB MOUSE ON THE PS2?
Nope – if you want fine control look to the PC later in the year.

Q. I WANT FULL BODY DISMEMBERMENT. HOW ABOUT BLOOD?
Sorry, but no. The bodies just roll over, die and then disappear.

Q. WHY IS THERE A FULL STOP BETWEEN THE 'KILL' AND 'SWITCH' OF THE TITLE?
Because it looks cool.



The game's 'Blindfire' technique will let you fire off a few rounds without having to step out from your hiding place. But don't try to rely on it for precision kills – you'll need to get up close if you want a bit more accuracy.



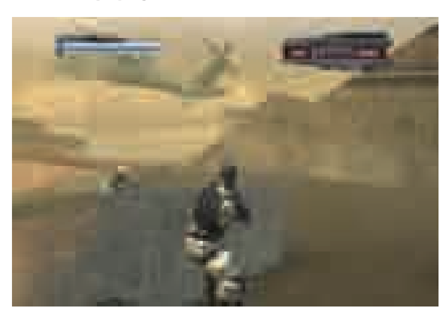
Progression is fairly linear, leaving you to concentrate on killing people rather than having to worry about little things like where to go next.

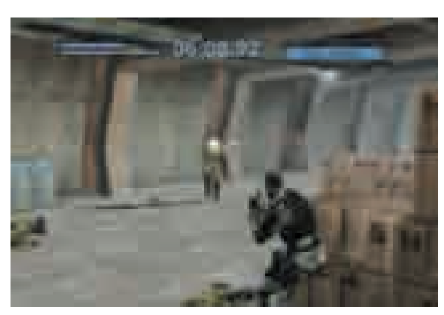


If things aren't going your way you can switch between up to 16 different weapons mid-battle.

WHERE'S YOUR HEAD AT?

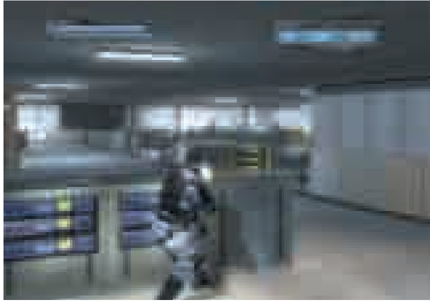
***kill.switch* has just one major claim to fame in that it allows you to shoot round corners without you needing to look; simply hold L1 when you're next to a wall and you'll take cover before firing. However, aim from this position and you'll shoot in such an inaccurate way that the chances of hitting anything are pretty slim. Okay, so this trick does allow you to keep the enemy busy, but thanks to your finite ammo you won't want to waste too many bullets when a more direct approach often pays greater dividends.**





option. Does it matter that both *Ikari Warriors* and *Cabal* had this option? For the purpose of this review, we'd like to think it does.

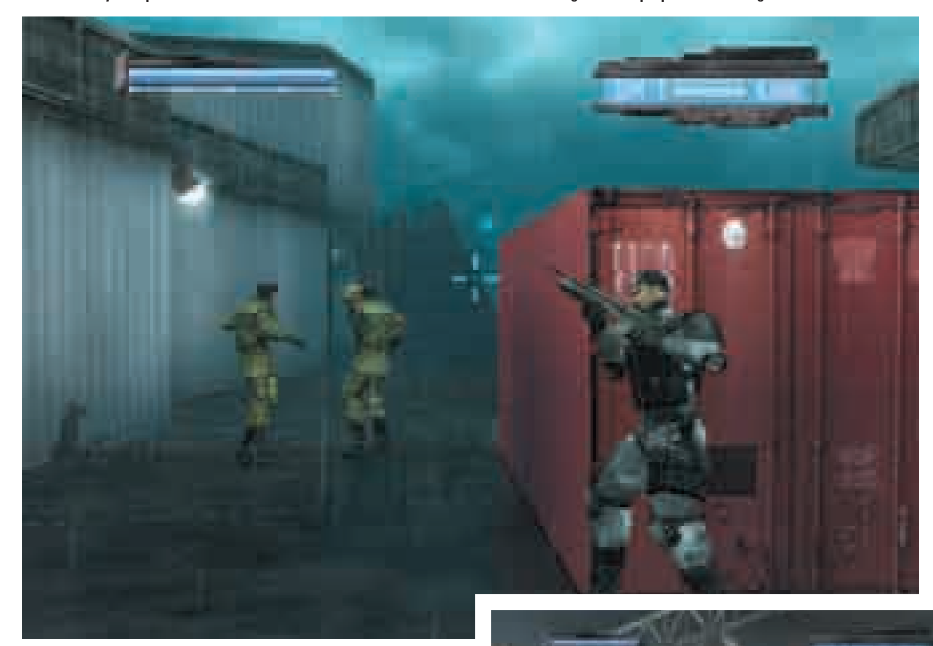
For a game that's so simple, the visuals are somewhat underpowered if not just functional. Explosions provide a simple bump of fire while the death animations, although amusing the first time, repeat far too often to make them stand out in a world of real-time body physics. The controls almost beg to be translated to either a mouse or trackball since the PS2's analog sticks simply don't provide the accuracy you'd need to stop blaming your tools when you end up dead simply because you couldn't hit a guy standing only a few feet away. Obviously, this problem gets fixed on the PC version and, thanks to its superior analogue, the Xbox too. But then those versions have to put up with visuals barely tweaked from the PlayStation.



kill.switch lacks the precision stealth of *MGS2*, but at least it ups the fun factor by a couple of notches.

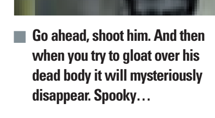


There is a sort of story to the game and, yes, it's a bit like *Robocop*. You'll also get to shoot people in a wide range of countries. Nice.



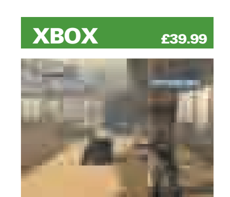
And as for the music, just imagine an annoying synth track that lasts a few seconds, then repeats. That's just the first level and it's so annoying it makes you want to kill. Maybe that was the point.

kill.switch is another Namco Hometek creation and, to be fair, it's a hell of a lot better than *Dead To Rights*. It has real-world weaponry in an arcade setting (woo!). You can snap to a first-person gun-sight view and the screen focuses just like *Rainbow Six* (yay!). Damn, this game does so many good things it's a shame the developer just didn't spend extra time making it shine. In a perfect world all budget games will be of *kill.switch*'s quality – that's where it would soar, that's where it would be ideal. As it is, it's almost exactly six hours of gung-ho entertainment from the moment you switch on your machine. But that's still just six hours…



Go ahead, shoot him. And then when you try to gloat over his dead body it will mysteriously disappear. Spooky…

XBOX £39.99

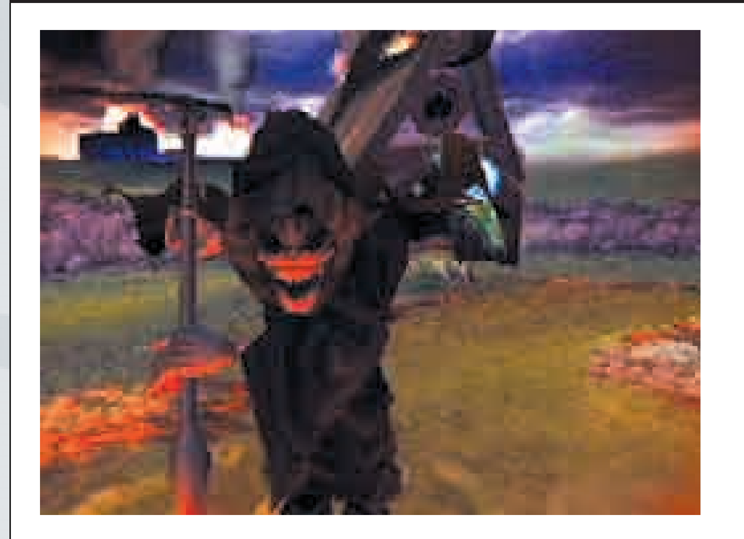


Graphically, there's very little to differentiate the Xbox and PS2 versions of *kill.switch*. The Xbox controls, however, are slightly more accurate thanks to superior analogue control, which makes for a more presentable kill.ing experience.



VERDICT 5/10
A PERFECT GUN-THIRSTY RENTAL







DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
13 February

PLAYERS
1

HE'S MATES WITH DEATH AND WEARS MAGIC UNDERPANTS. WHAT A GUY

MAXIMO VS ARMY OF ZIN

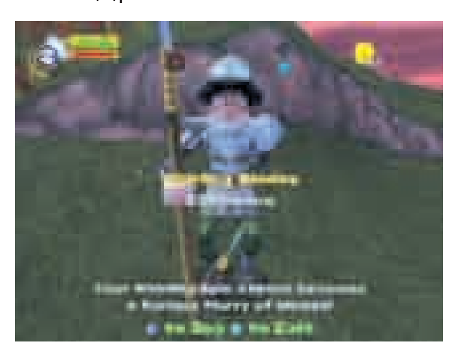
What is it with Capcom and souls? *Devil May Cry* – kill things and collect their souls. *Onimusha* – kill things and collect their souls. *Chaos Legion, Gregory Horror Show*… the list goes on. So it won't come as any great surprise to learn that the main objective in *Maximo Vs Army Of Zin* conforms to this tried and tested template. This time, the familiar glowing blobs of human essence power hulking clockwork machines bent on destroying all that is good and pure. But their encasement inside these mechanical soldiers of the Army of Zin means Maximo will have a rather unusual ally to help him track down missing girlfriend Sophia – Death. Unhappy that the spirits are trapped, Grim (as Maximo affectionately calls him) has agreed to lend a hand to set them free…

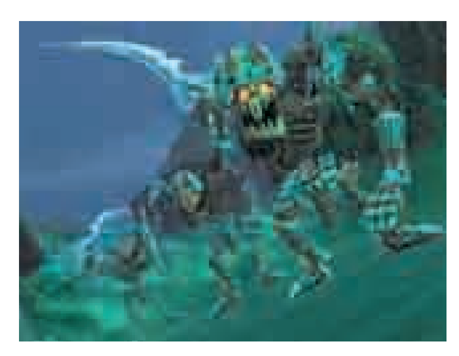
The ability to temporarily take on the guise of the Grim Reaper (and use all his supernatural talents) is just one of the new features added to this sequel to the popular *Ghosts To Glory*. New weapons, new combo moves, a greater appreciation of the needs of innocent bystanders and a wider range of underwear sets things up for *Army Of Zin*. Rescue a fair maiden from the clutches of rampaging robots and you'll be rewarded with cash and hints. Sniff out enough Treasure Chests and you can purchase new combos, better armour and useful items like Cash Magnets and Treasure Location Sensors (assuming that the appropriate vendor doesn't get mown down by a sea of blades before you rescue them). Alas, save all the merchants in the world and you still won't be able to get the one power-up you really need – the one that makes Maximo put a bit more effort into jumping…

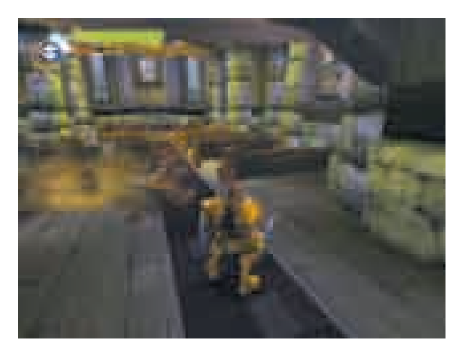
The need to jump from platform to platform can very easily be the 'make or break' factor in a game of this nature, and here it very nearly breaks it. Situations where you're required to call

Rescue merchants and vendors from Zin and you'll be able to buy new goodies, moves and, er, pants.

Once you've bought the appropriate underwear, Maximo will be able to upgrade to the ultra-strong gold armour.







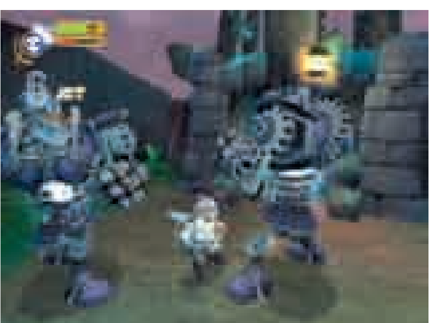
ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

EASIER?: The game is less unforgiving than Maximo's previous outing. But not much…

FIGHTIER?: Slicker combat, more moves and better weapons than the last game. Lovely.







This is just one of many irritating jumping sections where you wish Maximo would put in a bit more effort.

MEN IN PANTS

The boxer-short legacy continues. In *Ghosts To Glory*, Maximo had a number of different undergarments he could collect. However, acquiring said pants was little more than lip service for the '100% complete' people amongst you – none of them had any particular use (other than hiding Maximo's modesty, of course). But things have changed; in *Army Of Zin*, not only is there a whole new batch of grundies to collect and keep, but they have different uses too. These include the Treasure Locator Pants, Jewelled Battle Shorts, Boxers Of Burning Vigour (we'll pass on those, thanks) and many more. We'd like to see you top that, Marks & Spencer…



Maximo's pants do more than just keep him snug 'downstairs'; each pair has a useful power that will help our hero on his mission.

on a bit of leaping are fraught with hazards – not least because most will result in instant death should you not make it. With Maximo reluctant to jump too far, and most chasms at the full stretch of his athleticism, some sections that should be relatively straightforward become needlessly unpredictable. Luckily, this is compensated for by the attention paid to the combat. Each weapon has a surprising number of moves, and the initial enthusiastic button bashing does lay the foundations for some impressively destructive attacks – extremely handy when confronted by a giant mechanical chicken equipped with a pair of mini-guns. In fact, the tweaked combat system used here manages to make both Jubei and Dante look a little inadequate.

But are different coloured boxer shorts and an affiliation with the Reaper enough to cut it alongside the likes of *Ratchet & Clank 2* and *Jak II*? Nearly. While these games have enough gimmicks and variety to keep you on your toes, *Maximo Vs Army Of Zin* is more of a no-nonsense, honest-to-goodness platformer. It knows what it wants to do and presents things in a way that looks good and works well. But despite being sturdily put together and instantly enjoyable, it's hard not to think that it loses the impact it once held in the face of the latest batch of fresh and technologically impressive titles in the genre. Some of you will appreciate the perseverance with the old-school (if watered down) gaming ethics (tiny health bars, three lives and no continues except from your last save point), and this fact alone makes this better than the mind-numbing repetitiveness of *Devil May Cry 2*.

Unfortunately, *Maximo Vs Army Of Zin* isn't quite trying hard enough to do anything more than Capcom knows it can do easily already. As a continuation of the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* legacy, this achieves everything it set out to do, but it's not an innovative and varied adventure like others we have seen elsewhere. Perhaps if Capcom let go of its fixation with the essence of life, it would be free to try something we haven't seen before.

FAQs

Q. MORE COMBAT MOVES?
Yep. There are over 30 different combo moves that can be learned and bought.

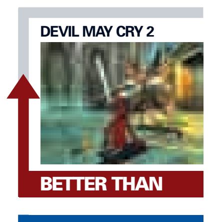
Q. REPLAY VALUE?
The amount of enemies you defeat and Coins you collect dictates your level rating, so you can return to each to improve your score.

Q. REWARDS FOR MORE STYLISH KILLS?
Thanks to the 'Vanquish Bonus', faster and more furious attacks will earn you more Coins.



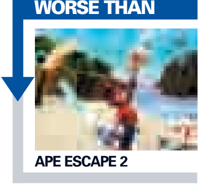
SOLID AND PLAYABLE BUT SOON BECOMING OUTDATED

DEVIL MAY CRY 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



APE ESCAPE 2

gamesTM ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
MINI-ME: Amazingly, the action scales down very well on the small screen.
STUNNING: How did all the sampled speech and huge levels fit on the tiny cartridge?



Bullet Time works remarkably well in this smaller environment, although it is quite stringently rationed.



Picking out your tiny target can be tricky at times…



The game is filled with neat touches and details, which are particularly impressive for a handheld title.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER
Möbius Entertainment
PRICE
£29.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1

WHAT'S NEXT – HALF-LIFE 2 ON N-GAGE?

MAX PAYNE

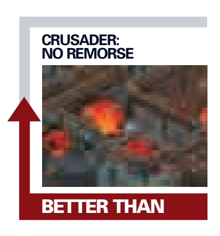
Think of the games you'd most like to play on the move and chances are many of the names that come up will be entirely unsuited to a handheld format. This doesn't seem to have stopped N-Gage developers throwing the likes of *Tomb Raider*, *Splinter Cell* and *Red Faction* at the oddly proportioned screen with varying degrees of success, but it's a simple fact that trying to do a faithful conversion of such advanced titles is almost certain to fail. Sam Fisher's handheld adventure is testament to this and, knowing that a straight port would be impossible, *Splinter Cell* became a simplified platform game and benefited greatly for it. Naturally, a game so heavily based on action and style as Remedy's *Max Payne* may not be the obvious title to scale down, and we're sure we weren't alone in our worries about the concept. But with a drastic change of camera and a hell of a lot of data compression, Max is finally ready to bring Bullet Time to bus stops and long-haul flights the world over.

Unfortunately, the villain of the piece is the new isometric viewpoint, or at least its integration into the familiar level design; since this is quite a diversion from the original camera, some areas have had to be altered or removed entirely while others obviously feel the technical constraints. The worst aspect of this new outlook on the adventure, though, are the troupes of over-eager enemies; all too keen to blow you away, the lead-flinging hoodlums aren't above loosing several volleys before they even enter your field of vision. As you can imagine this gets more than a little frustrating, particularly in the latter stages when shotguns, automatics and explosives become standard issue, although the new system of lives balances this out somewhat.

For the most part, the seemingly unholy fusion of fast-paced 3D action and the three-inch screen of the GBA works rather well, and for every area in which Max slips up the sheer magnitude of the technical achievement saves the day. Aside from slight grievances with accuracy and unseen foes, this is as faithful a port as you're likely to play on a handheld this year – even more so than we could have hoped, in fact. While it may lack in the 'lasting appeal' department, *Max Payne* is the perfect 'in-your-face' for Nintendo to throw at the technically superior Nokia platform.

VERDICT 6/10
A TECHNICAL MARVEL, IF A RATHER SHORT-LIVED ONE

CRUSADER: NO REMORSE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR

DYNASTY WARRIORS 4 XTREME LEGENDS

SAMURAI SWORDS AT THE READY AS THE SAGA CONTINUES

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Koei

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£24.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

To an innocent bystander it might look like Koei is on a mission to steal the 'Most games based on a single IP' trophy from the *Star Wars* series. In fact, if games based on the *Three Kingdoms* saga continue to surface at such an alarming rate it won't be long before Lu Bu, Cao Cao and the wealth of other generals battle their way to saturation point. That's not to say that the games aren't good – both the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Dynasty Tactics* series have now evolved to represent some of the better games in their respective fields. And although there are only so many times we can sit through a gently tweaked version of the same game, a little creativity and variety has gone into the extras to make this remix title that much more 'xtreme' than its forerunners; just enough, in fact, to save it from feeling too stale. *Just* enough, mind…

The bizarre omission of Musou mode does this standalone/add-on oddity few favours (the mode is only playable if you use the disc in conjunction with the original *Dynasty Warriors 4*), but, thankfully, the new Xtreme mode offers a similar experience, albeit one seemingly tailored to those who care more for the action elements of the game than the strong story. By contrast, Legend mode offers one themed mission for every character in the game, each of which is based heavily on the *Three Kingdoms* novels that inspire the series. These are great inclusions but with the main game mode only available to owners of both games, the two new modes will have their work cut out holding your attention.

If you can make out what's actually going on here, you'll probably enjoy this game…



games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

HARDER, BETTER: New difficulty levels and scenarios make for extended play potential…

FASTER, STRONGER: … as do new weapons and modes, but you need the last game to unlock some.

Our overall impression of *Xtreme Legends* (terrible name aside) is very mixed; only dedicated fans of the series will get enough mileage out of the add-ons to make it a worthwhile purchase, while the standalone elements lack the sense of achievement and progression of *Dynasty Warriors 4*. That said, the core game is accomplished enough, and *XL* is an affordable and enjoyable pick-up-and-play option for those looking for a little no-nonsense mass slaughter. It's just not the definitive moment in the series that we were hoping for.

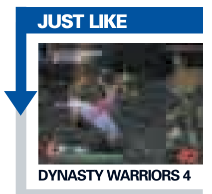
VERDICT 6/10
SOLID ENOUGH DESPITE CONFUSED INTENTIONS

CHAOS LEGION



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



DYNASTY WARRIORS 4





DETAILS



FORMAT
GameCube

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, Xbox

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Kemco

DEVELOPER
Bits Studios

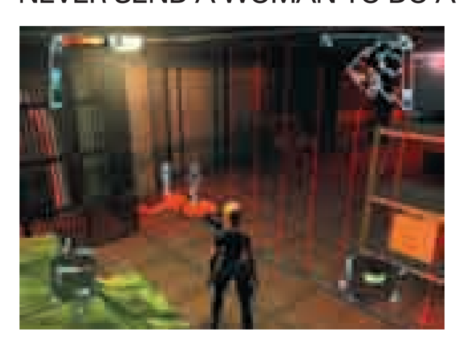
PRICE
£39.99

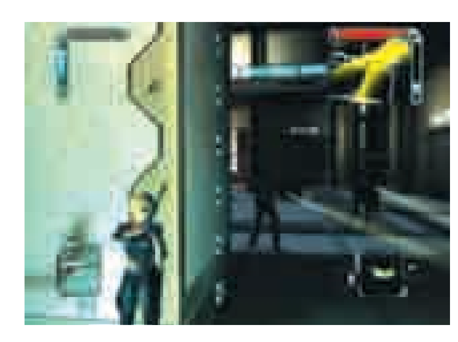
RELEASE
6 February

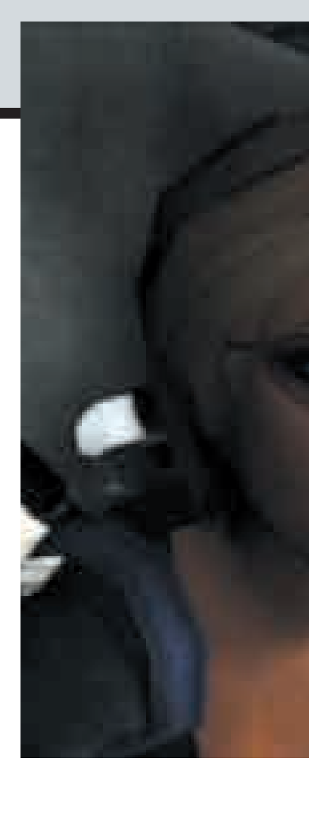
PLAYERS
1

ROGUE OPS

NEVER SEND A WOMAN TO DO A MAN'S JOB





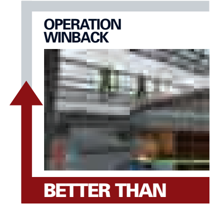


Ladies and gentlemen, forget cel-shading, ragdoll physics or the art of war and behold the games industry's current darling – the stealth genre. Having gone from a single example in the original *Metal Gear Solid* to too many games to count (ranging from innovative delights to cloned rehashes), it just goes to show how a single good idea can spawn an entire genre in a relatively short period. But with all the stealth heroes up to now being men, it was only a matter of time before someone came up with the premise of '*Splinter Cell* with tits', which is exactly how Bits Studios describes its first foray into the genre, *Rogue Ops*.

Our heroine is Nikki Conners – your average Green Beret lady who turns stealth assassin after seeing her husband and daughter killed by a terrorist organisation; a set-up that offers plenty of revenge-driven, stealth-based activities. So far, so every other stealth clone, right? Well, yes, but then *Rogue Ops* isn't intended to be a grit-encrusted slice of realism as far as covert operations go; instead, it's meant to be a more arcade-style action adventure. That isn't to say that it doesn't crib from elsewhere, but rather than being an all-out exercise in copying someone else's ideas it's fair to say that *Rogue Ops* is to *Splinter Cell* what *Perfect Dark* was to *GoldenEye* – not just because it has a female lead, but also because it manages to introduce several unique elements while disappointing on so many other levels.

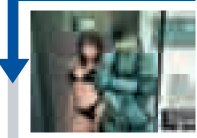
In terms of innovation, Bits Studios has at least had the sense to refine some of the more hackneyed or annoying elements of the stealth genre (particularly those that fail to make sense to any logical person) in ways that haven't been done before. What's more, they're just small ideas that could have easily been changed in previous stealth games if only the developers had thought of them – simple things like having a visible arc on screen when throwing grenades to prevent you blowing yourself up; being able to use dead bodies to block laser beams and lure enemies into traps; or even having guards that never go back to a neutral state once they've seen you. Like we said, it's the little things that make a difference.

OPERATION WINBACK



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MGS: SONS OF LIBERTY

■ There are clever ways to get past most situations. Drop a flame on this guy's explosive backpack and sit back…





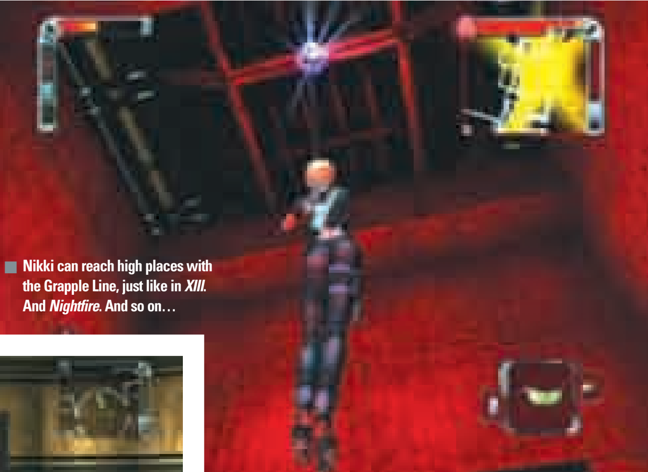


Nikki gets to chat to other members of her team, though this is hardly riveting.



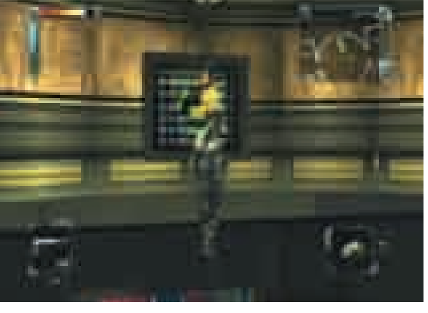
VISION ON

When it comes to gadgets, Nikki's equipped to the hilt with handy bits of kit although you'll only get certain ones depending on which mission you're on. Items like the Visor (or VISER, to use its proper name) let you see through walls and detect enemies' body heat so you can plan your movements effectively; while the Retina Scanner detects the retinal signature of certain guards so you can easily bypass security. Best of all is the Fly-Cam that lets you zip through a level unhampered to check out what lies ahead.



Nikki can reach high places with the Grapple Line, just like in *XIII*. And *Nightfire*. And so on…





Unfortunately, while *Rogue Ops* appears to have all the bases covered in the 'clever little ideas' departments, it also manages to fall short of competently providing even the most basic elements. This being a stealth game, it should come as no surprise to find that the gameplay is based on finding ways around being detected, but it just doesn't work. Take hiding in shadows, for instance – a guaranteed element of any stealth title. *Rogue Ops* has a time meter when you stand in a suitable hiding spot, meaning the longer you stand still, the better hidden you'll be. While this isn't perfect, it's made worse by the fact the game can't decide what constitutes a 'shadowy spot'. Area A might look just as dark as Area B, but guards will easily spot you in one but not the other – something that gives the stealth concept a sense of inconsistency. Not that it matters much, considering the similar dearth of decent AI; despite the neat 'once seen, always remembered' idea, you never feel that you're in any danger unless you're incredibly careless. Even *Manhunt* – with its decidedly unsubtle 'now you see me, now you don't' shadows – worked better than this and that's saying something.

And then there's the fact that for all the supposed freedom the game offers in how you play each stage, *Rogue Ops* is incredibly limiting when it comes to actually letting you do things. Interaction with objects maintains the game's preference for inconsistency, with some items like cupboards and drawers not being accessible while other identical ones are. The idea that Nikki can't climb up onto a set of boxes because you're not supposed to or onto a low ledge just because there's a set of steps nearby is also rather ludicrous. Indeed, you often end up scanning every room with the View cursor just to find out which objects you can interact with.

And it's this rigidity under the façade of freedom – combined with an incredibly dodgy frame rate, some clumsy animation and by-the-numbers puzzles – that prevents *Rogue Ops* from being anything other than a sub-standard stealth clone. Against the competition, which is growing stronger by the month, it's hardly surprising, but we expected better than this.

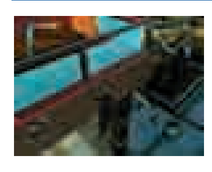


VERDICT 3/10

SHOULD SINK INTO THE SHADOWS WITHOUT TRACE

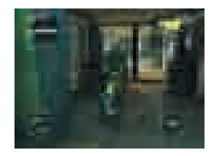
PS2	£39.99	6 FEB



Comes off best in terms of control, but looks the worst out of the three versions by a tiny margin. And where's the headset support? It's not like the console doesn't have one…

XBOX	£39.99	6 FEB



Xbox gamers can use their Live Communicators as a means of accessing Nikki's inventory, but how shouting out weapon names doesn't alert the guards is beyond us.

FAQs

Q. IT LOOKS ALL RIGHT…
To be fair, there are a few decent ideas here; there's just not enough of them to cover the gaping holes in the rest of the game.

Q. SO WHAT'S WRONG?
Quite a bit, actually. The controls take a lot of getting used to, the graphics are pretty basic and the stealth elements are weak.

Q. IN A NUTSHELL?
It's a stealth game à la *Splinter Cell* with a pinch of *Hitman*'s multiple routes and some clever ideas boiled down into a disappointing package.


eMag

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Germany

PUBLISHER
Wanadoo

DEVELOPER
Spellbound Studios

PRICE
£29.99

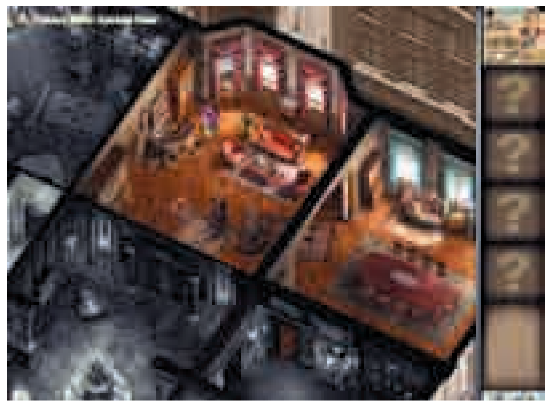
RELEASE
Out Now

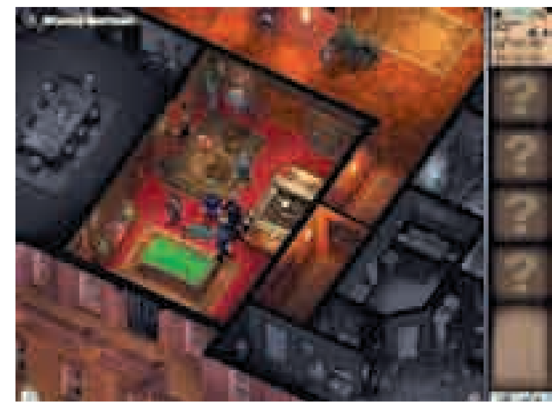
PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
300MHz Processor, 64Mb RAM, 900Mb HDD space, 4Mb Video Card

BUY THIS AND ASK FOR SOME CONCRETE BOOTS FREE OF CHARGE

CHICAGO 1930





Talking to people helps move each mission on, though the horribly linear scripting means you can only do so when the game lets you.

Having already had relative success with the likes of *Desperados* and *Robin Hood: Legend Of Sherwood Forest*, you'd have thought that Spellbound Studios would have managed to grasp the concept of isometric action strategy games by now. Combine this anticipated expertise with the concept of leading a team of either gangsters or cops around prohibition-era Chicago and you might even get the tiniest bit excited (if you're into that sort of thing, of course). But even if you are overjoyed about the prospect of *Chicago 1930*, we doubt even the most stalwart fan of the genre will be able to derive much enjoyment from Spellbound's latest effort.

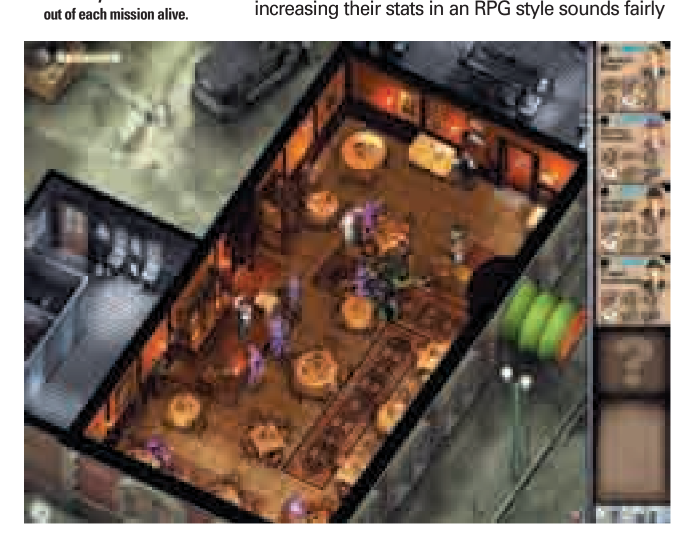
Unfortunately, the big problem with this game is that it promises plenty yet delivers very little as far as gaming experiences go. The idea of being able to choose which side you're playing for (ultimately determining the types of missions you'll get to try your hand at) and the scope for developing your team of characters through increasing their stats in an RPG style sounds fairly decent at first, but, sadly, this turns out to be mere window-dressing for the horribly sterile and linear gameplay hidden underneath.

And believe us, it is linear. So linear, in fact, that the game practically forces you to complete each mission in one particular way by either restricting the order in which you can talk to characters (speech bubbles only appear when you've fulfilled other criteria like talking to someone else first) or by ensuring you'll die if you try to take any other route through a mission. What's more, interacting with objects is severely limited, meaning you can simply run the cursor around each room to see what you can pick up or search. The AI is particularly useless as well, with enemies happily returning to their original positions after attacking you, even if you happen to be right behind them. Not that this guarantees you a kill, of course; the fighting system is so lax that even using a hand-to-hand weapon at close range on the back of someone's head isn't a sure thing.



The sad fact is that while *Chicago 1930* might have been an acceptable game a few years ago the genre has moved on since then, leaving obviously outdated and technologically primitive titles like this far behind. Hopefully, Spellbound will realise this in time for the release of *Desperados 2*; but for now we'll just write this one off as a mistake from which a few lessons can be learnt.

Storming into an area with all guns blazing might sound clever, but it's better to sneak around if you want to come out of each mission alive.



VERDICT 2/10
DESERVES TO BE SLEEPING WITH THE FISHES

HOOLIGANS: STORM OVER EUROPE

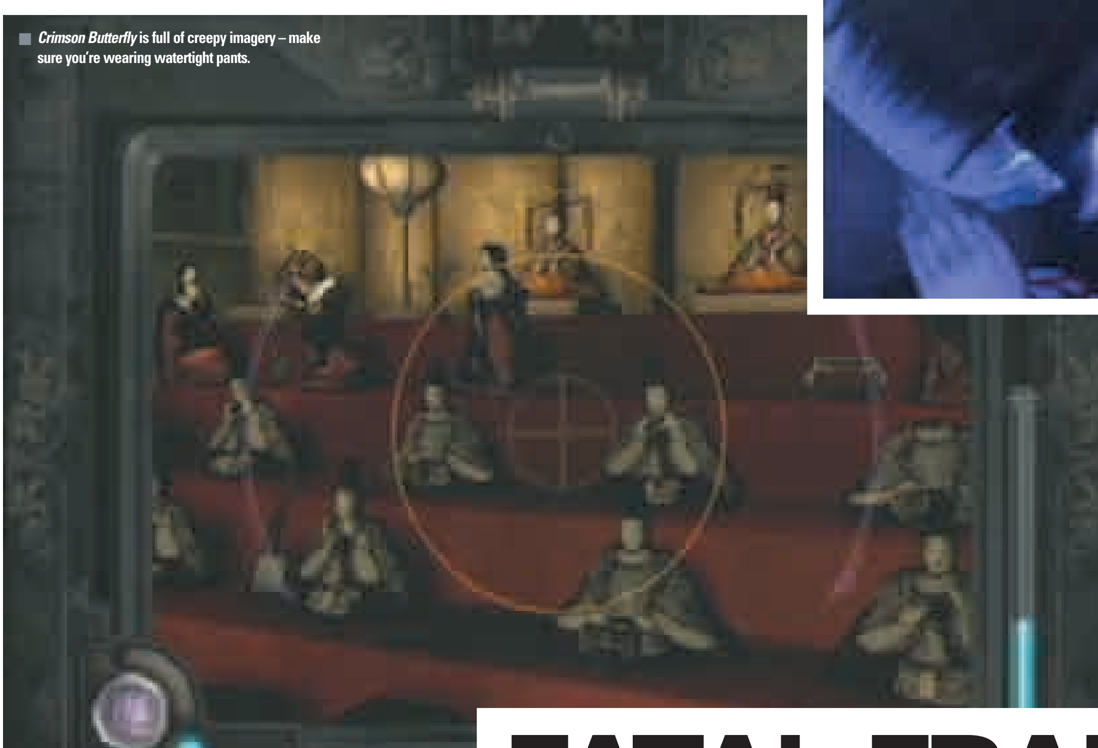


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



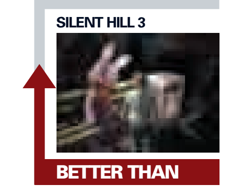
GANGSTERS 2: VENDETTA



Crimson Butterfly is full of creepy imagery – make sure you're wearing watertight pants.

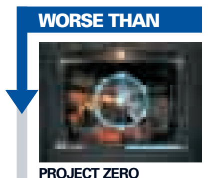


SILENT HILL 3



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



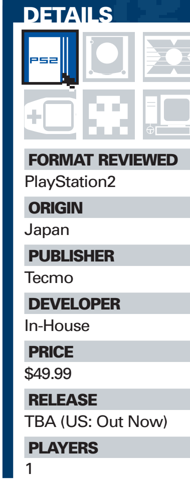
PROJECT ZERO



FATAL FRAME 2:



A perfect example of the frustrating Mayu. You need to be quick on the trigger.

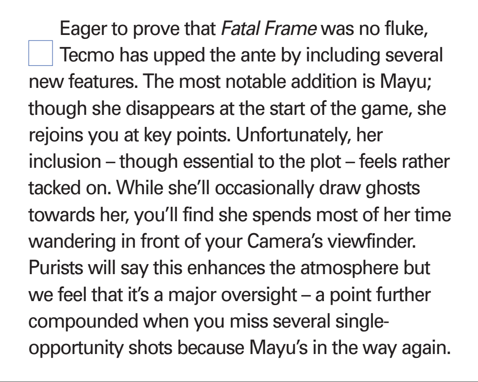


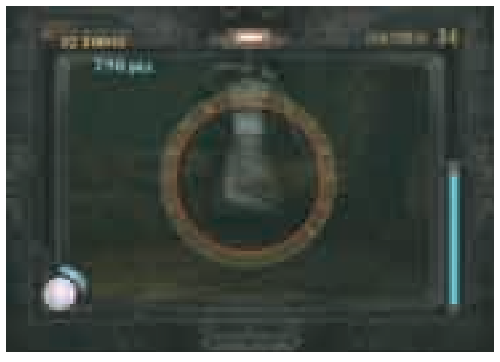
DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED	PlayStation2
ORIGIN	Japan
PUBLISHER	Tecmo
DEVELOPER	In-House
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASE	TBA (US: Out Now)
PLAYERS	1

Ever since Capcom's first poorly textured zombie took a bite out of *Resident Evil*'s Chris Redfield, gamers have been transfixed by survival horror. And now Tecmo has created a game that taps into our fear of the unknown with a tale that intrigues and terrifies in equal measures. As in its predecessor – *Fatal Frame* (or *Project Zero*, as it's known here) – the protagonist of *Crimson Butterfly* is a young girl, Mio. Along with her twin sister, Mayu, she finds a mysterious village, and before long the girls are separated, with Mayu gradually succumbing to the ancient evil the pair have uncovered. Armed only with her Camera Obscura (for exorcising tormented spirits), Mio soon discovers the ritual of the 'Crimson Sacrifice' – a horrific ceremony in which one sister is forced to kill the other – and must find a way to escape the same fate as those before them.

Eager to prove that *Fatal Frame* was no fluke, Tecmo has upped the ante by including several new features. The most notable addition is Mayu; though she disappears at the start of the game, she rejoins you at key points. Unfortunately, her inclusion – though essential to the plot – feels rather tacked on. While she'll occasionally draw ghosts towards her, you'll find she spends most of her time wandering in front of your Camera's viewfinder. Purists will say this enhances the atmosphere but we feel that it's a major oversight – a point further compounded when you miss several single-opportunity shots because Mayu's in the way again.





Your opponents come in all shapes and sizes, and you'll need to snap away as fast as you can.

TURN UP, TUNE IN

One neat addition to *Crimson Butterfly* is the Spirit Radio. Throughout her travels Mio finds many Crystals, often dropped by the game's deadly spirits. Trapped within these precious stones are the distorted memories of the ghosts' former lives. All are extremely disconcerting to listen to but can provide you will vital clues to aid you on your quest. Further snippets of information are revealed the deeper you get into the game and all are accompanied by the familiar sound of static. Sure, it's a shameless rip-off of the *Silent Hill* series, but at least it provides you with more than just an early warning. In fact, this is typical of *Crimson Butterfly* – where the original enhanced game mechanics, the sequel is content to borrow them.



games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

POWER CAMERA: Your camera lets you perform all manner of shots against your ghostly foes.

HEARING VOICES: The voice acting has improved from the original, adding plenty of atmosphere.

CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

TECMO ATTEMPTS TO UP THE HORROR ANTE YET AGAIN

Puzzles are another cause for concern; it's a good three hours before you encounter the first proper test and we were disappointed by the lack of skill required. Many are ridiculously simple and you may find yourself completing the game within just ten hours. Again, the opportunity to use Mayu has been poorly implemented and she's often little more than a handy weight whenever you need to open certain doors. Add the fact that many puzzles involve pointless backtracking to retrieve previously unusable items and the game feels a bit half-baked.

The genre's traditionally clumsy control system presents its own problems. This is more noticeable when you're trying to escape certain ghosts who are invulnerable to your Camera's powers – you'll die several quick deaths because the cumbersome controls weren't fast enough. Add to this the fact that several ghosts can kill you with one touch and the frustration mounts even further. Fortunately, the in-game atmosphere is almost enough to save *Crimson Butterfly*. Exploring the lost village is a terrifying experience that's enhanced by a greatly improved graphics engine and a well-structured soundtrack. Well, we say soundtrack, it's more a subtle mix of whimpers, pitiful screams and ominous effects that reaches a crescendo of white noise whenever you encounter a ghost.

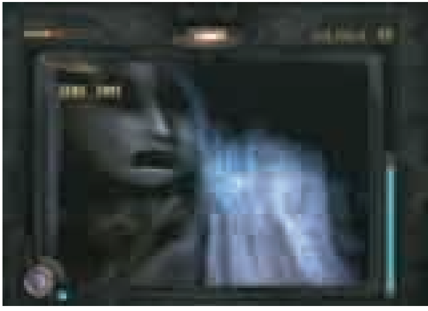
And it's these ghosts that prove to be *Crimson Butterfly*'s main draw; Tecmo has created some truly twisted creations that somehow seem even more frightening when seen through the narrow lens of your Camera. Women drop from the air and crawl towards you as fast as their broken limbs will carry them, while other spirits will try to grapple the very life from you. All are beautifully created and possess all manner of warping and translucent effects as you battle them. Luckily, your Camera has been suitably enhanced and now features several new abilities that will put you on a more even footing with your ghostly assailants (controls notwithstanding).

Despite the fact that ghosts often attack en masse, *Crimson Butterfly* is a good deal easier than its predecessor. Sure, it gets slightly tougher as you reach the finale but a challenge is definitely lacking. It's a good job that there are plenty of extras to ensure you'll still be playing this after it's been completed. A new chapter and several difficulty modes are perfectly complemented by the 25 trials found in Mission mode; add several endings and an inspired seventh chapter that totally changes the game's structure and you have a well-rounded package. Tecmo's latest effort may be flawed and far from innovative, but it's still an enjoyably scary experience.



VERDICT 6/10

AN ATMOSPHERIC GAME MARRED BY ANNOYING FLAWS



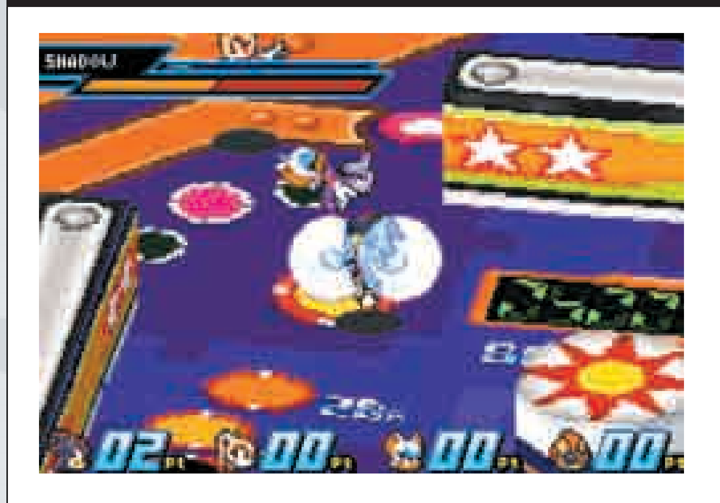
Leaving your shot until the last possible moment will allow you to cause maximum damage.

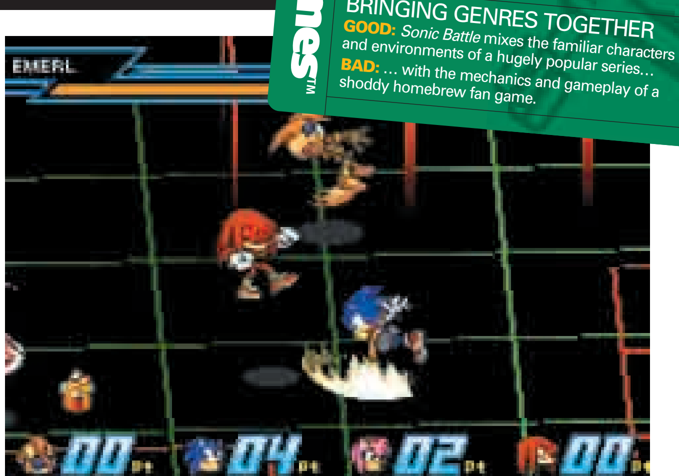
FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
With eight main chapters (plus a ninth on Hard mode) and over 20 missions, you'll be exploring *Crimson Butterfly* for some time.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE SECOND SISTER?
Unfortunately, Mayu is poorly implemented within the game. While she's obviously integral to the storyline, she causes several gameplay problems.

Q. ANY OTHER GRIPES?
Despite playing finished US code, we had to restart several times when Mayu trapped Mio in corners. Silly girl…





games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
GOOD: *Sonic Battle* mixes the familiar characters and environments of a hugely popular series…
BAD: … with the mechanics and gameplay of a shoddy homebrew fan game.

OH, HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN…

SONIC BATTLE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
TBC

PLAYERS
1-4

Some games simply should not exist. Fundamentally flawed on multiple levels, this beat-'em-up – the hedgehog's most misguided effort to date (*Sonic Shuffle* included) – should never have got past the concept phase. Not only is it among the genres least suited to a handheld, it also features a cast of established buddies beating the stuffing out of each other. Up to four of the familiar cast (and a few newcomers) can duke it out in 3D arenas, and while there may be a good array of options and game modes the actual fighting is one of the most soul-destroying experiences on the Game Boy Advance.

If ever a title were to prove that 3D fighters don't work with sprite-based characters on a small screen, *Sonic Battle* would be that game. Attack connection is nothing short of a joke and the appalling character balancing doesn't make it any funnier. Several battlers lack the pace to evade attacks with any efficiency while new character Emerl's pathetic jumping ability means he can't actually negotiate terrain until you've put a fair bit of time into Story mode. Arenas are simply-rendered 3D environments but the background scrolling clashes horribly with the sprites, leaving the overall aesthetic feel as a jumbled mess.

In fact, the only things that manage to prevent *Sonic Battle* from being a complete abomination are multiplayer battles and the Story mode. The former are as close to enjoyable as the game ever gets while the latter adds a welcome element of customisation. Despite these glimmers of hope, nothing can disguise the fact that the battles themselves are absolutely hideous, verging on unplayable at times. Given the great run of titles that the GBA has enjoyed over the last year there's simply no reason to buy such a pitiful excuse for a game. This is an insult to Sonic's good name – hell, don't even waste your time downloading the ROM (not that we'd condone such an act in the first place). And the good news? At least Sonic Team can't do much worse than this…

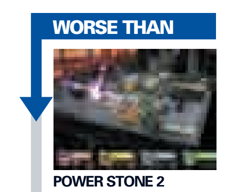
VERDICT 2/10
SHAMBOLIC AND UNBALANCED – A GAMING ATROCITY

RAKUGAKI SHOWTIME



JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN



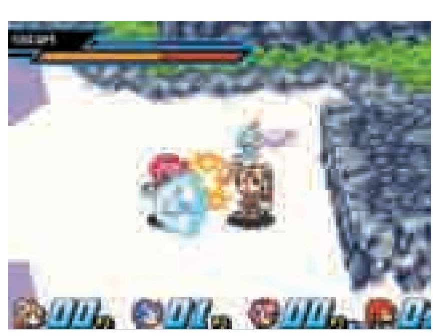
POWER STONE 2



We're no experts on Miles Prower but we just can't see him shooting his friends with a cannon…



Amy's room is as gaudily decorated as one would imagine but fighting in there just seems plain wrong.



Although the stages look different, they're essentially the same only with slightly rearranged block layouts.

NFL STREET

BROUGHT TO YOU TODAY BY THE LETTERS 'E' AND 'A' AND THE NUMBER SIX



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Game Cube, Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
EA Big

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Look on the bright side – it could have been called *NFL Underground* or *NFL Unleashed*. But whatever the moniker, EA's latest larger-than-life sports sim ditches the mad B-ball skills in favour of shoulder pads and broken bones, allowing teams of seven to overlook the rules of American football (wait a minute, there are rules?) and tread the fine line between showing off and crashing down. The stereotypical soundtrack and nigh-on perfect presentation are to be expected from an EA title but what of the core game? As it turns out, it's decent enough as well…

If you've had any dealings with either of the *NBA Street* games you'll know exactly what to expect from this football follow-up. Chunky and exaggerated character models, varied fields of play (beaches, fields and even concrete jungles) and all the hip and cool one-liners you could ever hope for. The game itself takes on the usual NFL formula – pick a play from the given list and pass or run your way to a touchdown – which is something of a shame given the over-the-top nature of the game. Regardless, the system does its job really quite well, but it's once the play has been made that your skills are called for. Runs and passes can be embellished with the usual array of cheeky tricks and silly runs to earn Trick Points but, again, this whole system simply doesn't translate as well to American football as it would to the likes of hockey or 'soccer'.

And that's the main problem with *NFL Street*; while the game mechanics are solid enough, the *Street* methods and ideals simply don't work when transferred from basketball to American football. Gamebreakers are now far too effective, basically giving guaranteed points rather than the more balanced advantage of *NBA Street*. Similarly, the game finds itself in a rather risky middle ground – fans of the sport will long for a more thorough playbook to go with the real world line-ups, while what refined strategy there is will still be enough to impede the pick-up-and-play nature that made the NBA original so great. If you're willing to put in a bit of time or you're at least mildly familiar with the sport, there's definitely a lot of fun to be had here, but if you go in expecting the immediate experience that the *Street* series does so well, you'll most likely end up disappointed. Still, we're looking forward to the inevitable *NHL Street*…



VERDICT 6/10
NOT AS STREET AS YOU MIGHT THINK

MULTIFORMAT



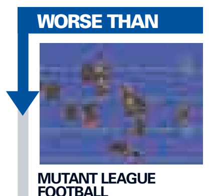
While the other two versions lack online play, they both boast improved visuals and loading times – the trade-off is that neither controls as well as with a Dual Shock 2.

NFL FEVER 2004



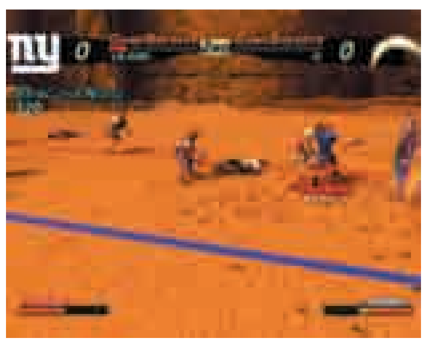
BETTER THAN

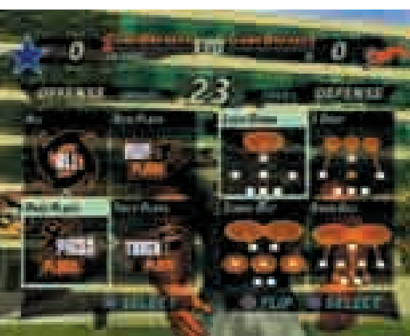
WORSE THAN



MUTANT LEAGUE FOOTBALL

Stringing moves together isn't as flowing or simple as it should be – *NBA Street* this ain't.





While we understand the importance of tactics, this method just breaks up the 'xtreme' action a little too much.



The interaction is a nice touch – beach balls, dustbins and whatever else is strewn around can be moved, smashed up and generally interfered with. This might not go down well with American-football purists but then what did you expect from a *Street* game?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Germany

PUBLISHER
Koch Media

DEVELOPER
Egosoft

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
6 February

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
800MHz processor, 128Mb RAM, 800Mb HDD space, 32Mb 3D graphics card

X²: THE THREAT

IS X² REALLY A THREAT TO ELITE'S CROWN?

It's a sad day when you boot up one of the greatest titles ever to grace the videogame world, only to realise that the magic that once captivated you for months on end now provides little more than a couple of hours of nostalgic bliss. Those who are no doubt leaping to the defence of one of their all-time favourite games perhaps haven't sat down with the mighty *Elite* recently and discovered that the incredible sense of awe at just how earth-shattering the freeform concept was back in 1987 eventually gives way to a rather unfulfilling gameplay experience. Don't get us wrong – we still have great memories of losing ourselves for hours at a time exploring the game's endless array of galaxies – yet uneventfully hopping from one barely spherical planet to the next no longer holds the enduring sense of adventure it once did.

While possibly the harshest ever summary of such a classic, the point is that it takes more than the bare bones of a space trading sim to capture the imagination these days. Microsoft's *Freelancer* was a success thanks to the thrill factor introduced by its fantastic combat engine, while the *Eve Online* universe was brought to life by the thousands of other gamers with whom you shared the skies, but *X²* sadly has no such tricks up its sleeve. Yes, the game offers players the same irresistible blank canvas upon which to create their own destiny, brings the visuals beautifully up to date, and even expands the genre's boundaries with some original ideas of its own, but despite being a mouth-watering proposition the actual playing experience makes for a curiously uninspiring ride.

As you'd expect from any game to follow in *Elite*'s footsteps, players are initially furnished with a bottom-of-the-range spacecraft before stepping into an epic universe of opportunities for the entrepreneurially minded pilot. There are countless ways to get the cash rolling in, from becoming an astral tour guide to living the less savoury life of a space pirate, but a combination of lacklustre combat and some extensive additions to the economic simulation makes intergalactic wheeling and dealing the most attractive route.

That's not to say there isn't ample opportunity to engage in the more violent aspects of life among the stars – particularly for those who choose to follow the mostly optional central storyline – but as this is the game's weakest area, the ability to sidestep many combat situations comes as something of a blessing. Targeting is hideously floaty and unresponsive with a lack of manoeuvrability that makes it impossible to pursue enemies around the skies in the way *Freelancer* managed to achieve so fluidly. The interface appears similarly determined to discourage players

FAQs

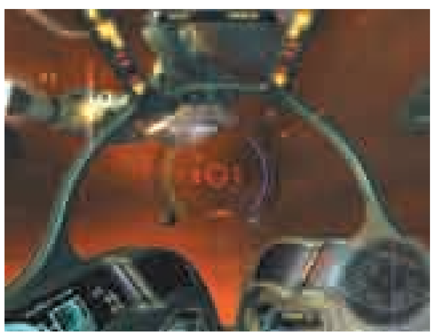
Q. SYSTEM SHOCK?
Even with a machine deemed to be 'ptimum spec in the 'read me' file, the game struggles to run at a decent resolution with the anti-aliasing and bump mapping options activated.

Q. GETTING ON THE PROPERTY LADDER?
You'll have plenty of opportunity for experiencing life as an odd-job man before you can afford to start building your galactic business empire.

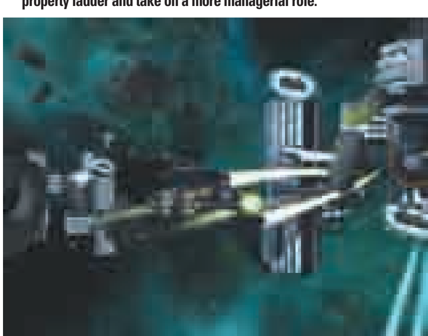
Q. WIRED FOR SOUND?
The game's soundtrack of ambient grooves is virtually impossible to fault, providing the perfect accompaniment to your adventures.



Controlling factories and your own logistic fleet allows you to become an intergalactic business tycoon. This is by far the most enjoyable part of the game but you'll have to work through a few hours of tedium and awkward space combat to get there…



It's worth persevering through the earlier levels so you can get on the property ladder and take on a more managerial role.





Combat is sadly uninspiring (thanks to frustrating controls) which takes a large chunk out of the gameplay experience.

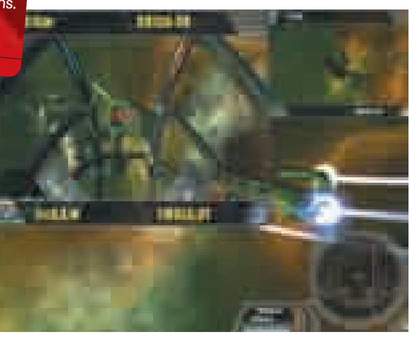
games™

ENHANCED

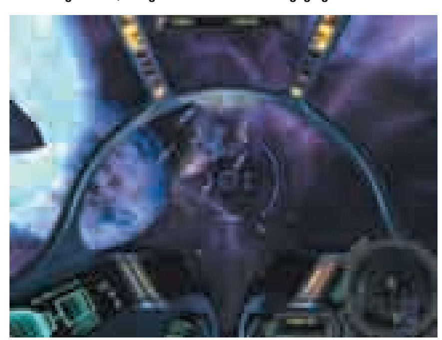
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SPACE TYCOON: Become the boss and spend your time managing an entire network of trade runs.

SKY'S THE LIMIT: With a whole fleet rather than just one ship to upgrade you'll be at it for months.



If you're looking to re-create *Elite*'s glory days then this is the best-looking 'tribute', though *Freelancer* is more engaging.





There's plenty of sightseeing to be done in the X^2 universe, with ship designs particularly impressing.



Your deep space environs are beautifully realised, but X^2 is strangely soulless and doesn't really absorb, particularly in the early stages.

from engaging in situations that require speedy reactions and, unless you've got an outstanding memory for shortcut keys, presents beginners with an intimidating learning curve. Even regular space travel proves trying; rescued from the unconvincing hands-on control by an efficient autopilot system, your journeys become a case of merely clicking on where you want to go and fast-forwarding time until you arrive. This reduces the game to a dirge of menu surfing and loses all the sense of adventure on which the genre was built.

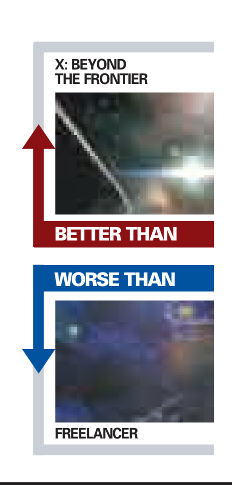
By now your eyes have probably wandered to the score, leaving you perplexed at how X^2 could even out all its negatives with just as many positives. Well, in a cunning move to imitate the game's structure, just as you've been convinced not to persevere you're introduced to the game's most impressive element. Once you've amassed a healthy collection of capital you're able to buy factories and start piecing together a thriving business empire. Gone are the days when a single upgradeable ship was the ceiling of your trading ability – now you can have an entire armada of vessels making trade runs between your suppliers, factories and trading ports. Suddenly the hands-off control is ideally suited to your managerial role as remote co-ordinator of a galactic business empire, and as your bank balance bulges the scope for diversifying your activities becomes immense.

But, alas, while these great ideas take the space trading genre to another level, there's just so little reward to be gained from actually exploring this wealth of opportunities. It reminds us of the almost perfect partner – great looks, extremely rich (in terms of possibilities and infinite depth), but with an almost intolerable lack of personality that undermines its exciting promise.

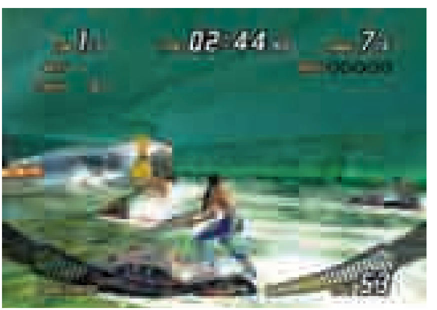


HEY, GOOD LOOKING

With so much more going for it in the aesthetic department than any other *Elite* clone, why isn't the X^2 universe a joy to explore? No, really, we want to know. There are some stunning sights to be seen, yet the lack of immersion conjured up by the game fails to put these pretty pictures to an effective use in enhancing the in-game experience. After playing *Freelancer* we mocked the sections that graphically depicted the customary docking menus as actual conversations between characters, but having gone back to the blandest of menu systems with X^2 we'd give anything to feel more like we'd actually landed at a destination rather than being met with just another screen of text.











DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Take 2

DEVELOPER
Argonaut

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

CARVE

SHOULD WATERY RIVALS TREMBLE IN ITS WAKE?

When we heard that Take 2 was to publish a water sports game by Argonaut, we feared the worst. Aside from *Max Payne* and *Vietcong*, neither publisher nor developer has had a particularly stunning line-up of games recently, and even the most accomplished developers seem unable to better the quality of Nintendo's classic N64 title, *Wave Race*. Thankfully, while *Carve* doesn't offer anything new, it's actually a very competent game for a number of reasons.

Although the craft lack the effortless control that you'd expect from machines skimming across the water's surface, there are plenty of skill-based special moves available, each resulting in a temporary boost of speed if performed successfully. Obviously influenced by Nintendo's offering, these manoeuvres aren't overly difficult to pull off – in fact, most of them are performed with the same button combinations as the N64 classic. A rip-off? Well, there was very little point in Argonaut trying to re-invent the wheel, especially after Nintendo had crafted it so flawlessly in the first place.

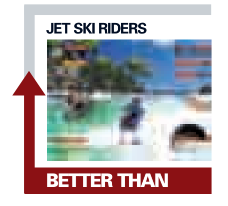
But what sets this title aside from most other water-based games is the range of multiplayer options. Up to four players can compete on one console and, although most of the special effects have been removed, the action is speedy; but you'll get most out of the game on Xbox Live. Working alone or with friends, *Carve*'s online races are unique as the properties of water allow for some novel gameplay. By crossing in front of rivals you can create waves that make life more difficult for them – something that works particularly well when playing as part of a team.

Like *Midnight Club 2*, *Carve* isn't the best game of its kind in single-player mode, but on Live it has a lot more to offer than first impressions suggest. Okay, so aside from some nice water effects the game is stuck in PS2 territory and some of the tracks are a little structurally underwhelming, but as the first online jet ski game this is above average.



VERDICT 6/10
AN AVERAGE GAME ENHANCED BY LIVE SUPPORT

JET SKI RIDERS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WAVE RACE 64



Like *Wave Race*, it's vitally important that buoys are passed on the correct side – miss five and you're out.



While *Carve* is generally fairly realistic, some sections of the courses are, er, larger than life.


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Cattle Call

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1

IS THERE ANY ROOM LEFT AT THE RPG INN?

ARC: TWILIGHT OF THE SPIRITS

With such heavyweight titles as *Dark Chronicle, Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter* and *Final Fantasy X-2* recently adding to the PS2's already overcrowded catalogue of top-notch RPGs, even the most dedicated adventurer is likely to have become more discerning when it comes to expanding their game library. In today's saturated market any new title is going to need something particularly special up its sleeve to succeed in the light of such fierce competition, yet, sadly, *Arc: Twilight Of The Spirits* doesn't offer anything that hasn't been seen countless times before.

However, while your average consumer may struggle to justify another investment of time and money in such an incredibly generic adventure, we genuinely found a lot to like about Sony's latest RPG and we feel a sense of injustice that this enjoyable little game is in danger of being overlooked completely. One of *Arc*'s strongest elements is its absorbing story, which is subtly woven to engulf and captivate players in the way all great role-playing adventures should. Refreshingly high in emotion and exploring such sensitive issues as misguided prejudice and the frailty of loyalty, the story follows the intertwined adventures of two estranged brothers on opposing sides of a tense racial stand-off. Drawing you in with its spellbinding charm and showcasing solid production values across the board there's little to particularly dislike about *Arc*, yet the complete absence of anything special offers minimal incentive to persevere.

The gameplay and structure is about as clichéd and traditional as it possibly could be, doing nothing more than taking players through the motions of character development and a string of turn-based battles without ever expanding upon the age-old role-playing format. A lack of secondary quests confines your journey to a rather restricting linear path, further emphasising the developer's reluctance to venture beyond the genre's most primitive conventions. That said, the game still delivers an enchanting experience, but against its more enterprising peers such an unremarkable affair is likely to suffer far more than it deserves.

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
BEEN THERE, DONE THAT: Uniqueness isn't exactly one of this game's strong points. Despite *Arc*'s high-quality delivery, we've already seen everything this standard format has to offer.

games™

VERDICT 5/10
A PLEASING BUT INCREDIBLY GENERIC RPG

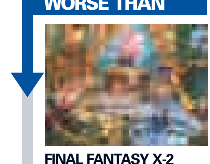
SHADOW HEARTS



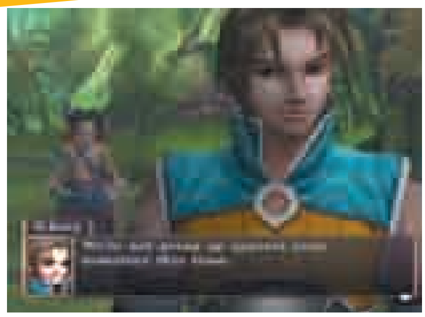


BETTER THAN

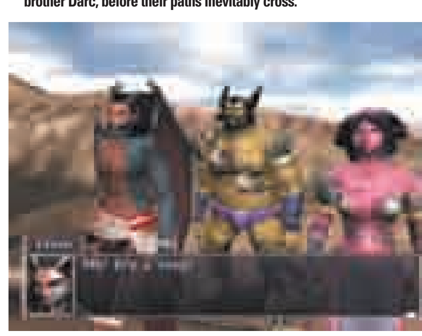
WORSE THAN



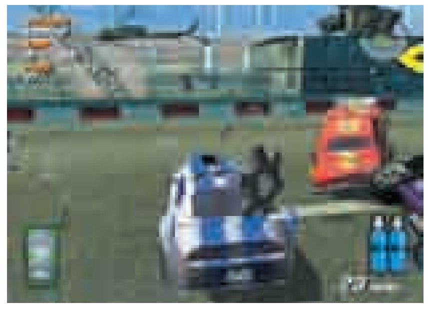
FINAL FANTASY X-2



Play initially switches between human hero Kharg and his Deimos brother Darc, before their paths inevitably cross.








A lacklustre physics engine takes most of the fun out of proceedings.



In a head-on collision you usually come away the victor. Lucky you.



Detonator-shaped pick-ups open up new routes around the track.

IN COMES THE CARNAGE, LIKE A RUNAWAY TRAIN FULL OF CORPSES…

DESTRUCTION DERBY ARENAS

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LOUD-MOUTHED: "Looks like South Central's due another riot" and other needlessly shouted comments attempt to get some (any) sort of reaction from listless gamers.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Studio 33

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16

Progress is inevitable, or so we're told. But explain that to the team behind *Destruction Derby Arenas* that has managed to construct a game that wouldn't have looked out of place on the N64, and actually plays with less success than the series' PSone debut. While it might seem churlish to complain about the technical inadequacies of a 'fun' game comprised of smashing up cars and collecting power-ups, it's no fun at all if the basic driving engine is frustratingly, unforgivably weak.

Choosing one of several oh-so-cool characters with names like Noire and Cadence (you can unlock Victim and Yin Yang later, amongst others), there are racing and Destruction Bowl modes in which to compete, though the difference between the two racing modes is negligible in gaming terms. Bonuses are awarded for performing stunts and spinning, flipping and destroying other cars (as well as actually finishing first), and pick-ups include the standard Nitrous Oxide Boosters and some much-needed extra grip. However, with 19 other racers on the track and the individual pick-ups respawning after only a few seconds' pause, collection (and therefore progress) is more down to luck than judgement.

The cars all drive like dodgems, which is fine for the banger-racing elements but in road races becomes awkward – piling into a turn too sharply brings your vehicle to a grinding halt, as if you're steering with the drive wheels and you've spun the axle 180 degrees. Again, there could be some fun to be had here but the physics engine ensures the cars fly around like bits of foam, and it's often Russian roulette as to whether the cars will hit a piece of scenery or hurtle through it. Additionally, for a game designed around the premise of damaging other vehicles the deformable object damage you'd expect on a current PlayStation2 title is heavily lacking, the game preferring to hover a little green energy bar above each car model as it races.

It's difficult to tell where the development process went wrong with *Destruction Derby Arenas*; perhaps Studio 33 thought some gamers would forgive bad gameplay in light of so much fun to be had, or perhaps someone noticed the shortfalls but only when it was too late or expensive to do anything about it. Sadly, despite ticking all the correct boxes *Arenas* lacks any synergy between components, making it the *Turok Evolution* of racing sequels.

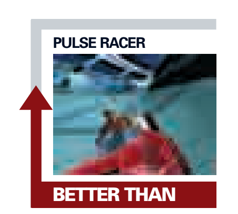
The proper derby sections are by far the best on offer, though the arenas are generally too big.



VERDICT 3/10

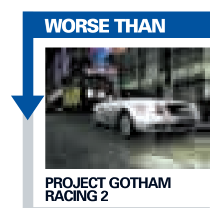
SO MISJUDGED EVEN ALAN PARTRIDGE WOULD WINCE

PULSE RACER

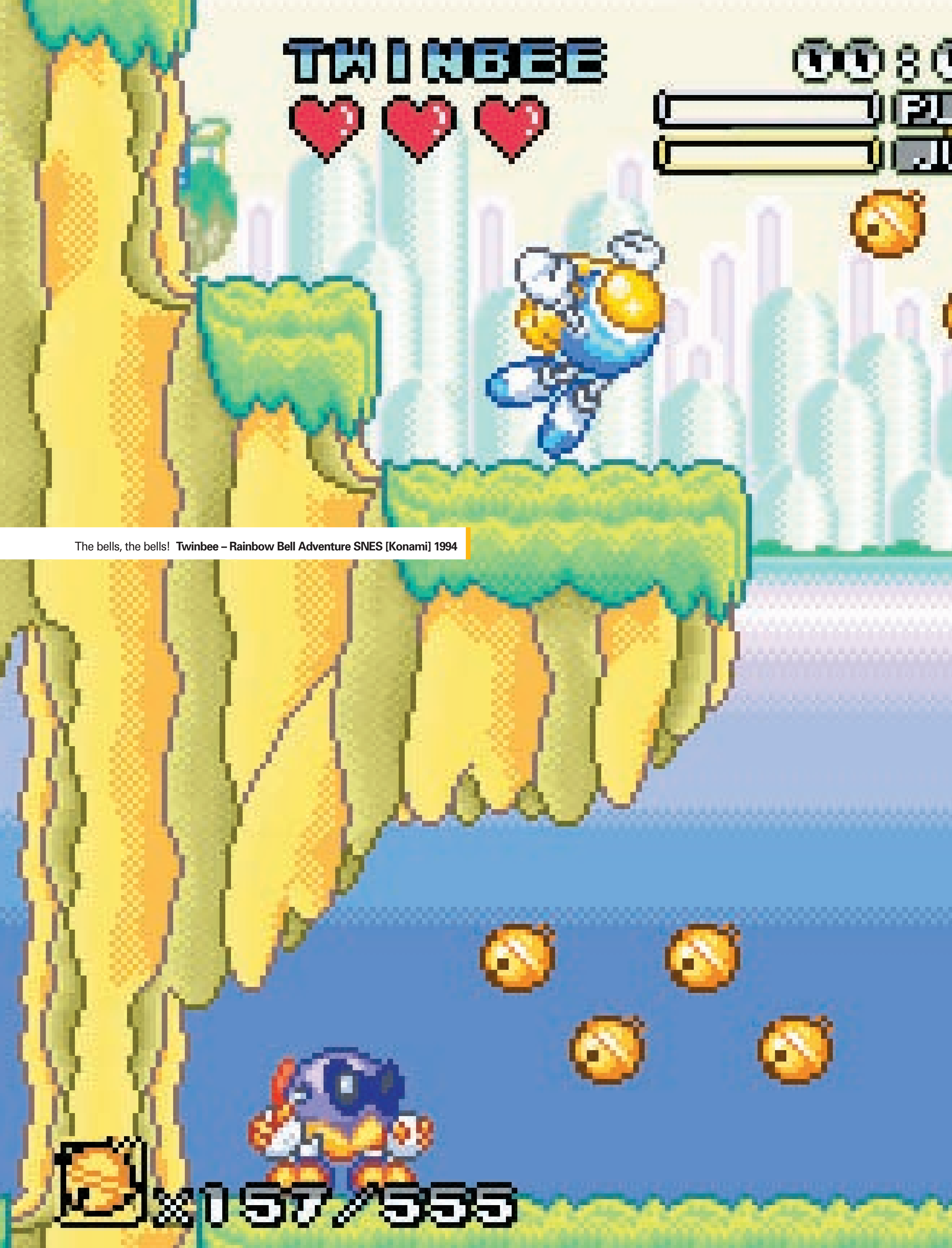


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2



The bells, the bells! **Twinbee – Rainbow Bell Adventure SNES [Konami] 1994**



01:50
NCH
UMP
WINBEE


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.15 FEBRUARY 2004
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
We guide Arthur through another classic level
Ghouls 'N Ghosts
Wonder Boy III
Go animal crackers with this great game!
Killer Instinct
Why don't they remake it?
Street Fighter
Do you remember all the games
in the Street Fighter family tree?
Look inside to find out!
GAME BOY
Read all about Nintendo's classic handheld
MONTHLY ALL-FORMAT RETRO GAMES FUN!
Sephiroth in FFVII
The greatest game boss of all time?
BUY AND SELL YOUR
OLD GAMES IN GTM!

RETRO NEWS

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING…

It's always hard to work out how old a game or system has to be before it can be called retro – we've already featured a handful of Dreamcast games, but we've only covered a few on the PSone. Of course, Dreamcast games are no longer being released in the West, while new PSone titles are still being made. However, 2004 marks the tenth anniversary of the PSone in Japan, so it's hard not to class the machine as retro.

Looking back to the launch, it's funny just how much animosity the PSone received from many hardcore gamers – even some of the **games™** team frowned upon Sony's cut-throat methods of stealing the market from our beloved Nintendo.

But there were some fantastic games on the machine over the years, including favourites such as *Soul Blade*, *Parappa The Rapper*, *Vib Ribbon*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *WipEout* and *Ridge Racer* – all games you can read about here in 2004.

Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

Anniversary Arcade Arrival

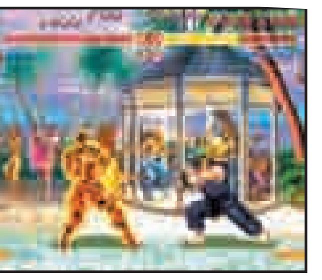
New Street Fighter to launch on CPSII



S*treet Fighter* fans will be pleased to hear that Capcom's PS2 compilation *Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition* will be launching in arcades this spring. Just like the PS2 version, you'll be able to chose between standard, *Champion*, *Turbo*, *Super* and *Super Turbo* versions of each character, though it's unclear whether you'll be able to have your pick of the various musical compositions like in the console game.

While we're not surprised by the announcement, it was only last year that the company said it would no longer produce new arcade titles; but presumably this doesn't count as a 'new' game because much of the core program code already exists on the CPSII board (which will be used to power the new title).

We don't know yet whether any sort of PS2-to-arcade data transfer via memory card will be available, though it's certainly an intriguing prospect. Just imagine if there were further unlockable characters in the arcade version that could be saved to memory card then taken home for use on the PS2. We'll just have to wait and see whether Capcom takes advantage of such opportunities – perhaps we could be witnessing the resurrection of *SFII*.



▲ Remember the red fireball? It's a standard move for Super Ryu but otherwise remains in glitch form.

Mega Collection

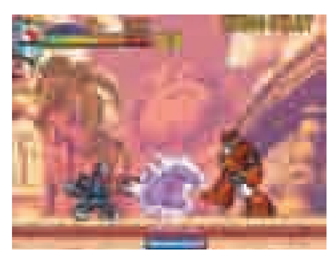
Mega Man compilation pack out soon

As of March, US gamers will be able to get their hands on Capcom's *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* for GameCube and PlayStation2. The pack will feature ten games, including *Mega Man 1-8* plus the *Mega Man: The Power Battle* and *Mega Man: The Power Fighters* arcade games which until now have never been released in the West.

While the games will remain in their original forms for both PS2 and GameCube, the two versions will offer slightly different bonus features. The PS2 game will include footage from the original *Mega Man* animated TV series, while the GameCube title will feature an interview with the game's creator and a history of the franchise.



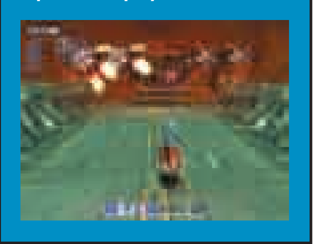
▲ Ten classic *Mega Man* games on one disc. Tasty.



Contra To Return

In a surprise announcement, Konami has confirmed that another instalment in the classic *Contra* series is due to hit the PlayStation2 later this year. Currently dubbed *Neo Contra*, the game assumes a 3D perspective much like Appaloosa's failed PSone attempt, *Contra: Legacy Of War*, though further details have yet to be unveiled.

From what we can tell from the early screenshots, the game will look and play a little like *Millennium Soldier* on the Dreamcast, though we hope that Konami will be able to make *Neo Contra* a little less repetitive to play.



This Month In 1982

The Stranglers were number one, everyone was watching Porky's and arcades were more popular than ever – February 1982 was clearly the place to be…

GAMING NEWS FEB '82

How Much Is Too Much?

It was in February 1982 that two hardcore gamers broke videogame records with some ridiculously high scores. On Saturday 6 February, Ken Chevalier scored 12,900,000 points on *BattleZone* having played it for 12 hours at the Star Station 101 arcade in Atascadero, California. His achievement came just two weeks after Leo Daniels had scored 40,101,910 points on *Asteroids* after playing it for a shattering 36 hours at Ocean View Corporation, North Carolina.

It was also during this month that observers started to question the effects of videogames on the young people's health. American news broadcasts claimed that children were missing school to play the latest arcade games, and even turning to crime in order to fund their habit. The leading report – 'Videogames – Fun Or Serious Threat?' – focused on a town in Massachusetts where delinquents were allegedly breaking into parking meters to get quarters to spend in arcades.

Elsewhere in America, physiologists were researching the effects of games, concentrating on violent content and how it could theoretically corrupt young minds. As videogames were still a relatively new form of entertainment there were very few cases of alleged game-related violent incidents, but people were already suggesting that shooting games were training children how to kill.

These claims still dog gaming today, though it's interesting to think that this was over 20 years ago, well before games like *Mortal Kombat* and *Vice City*…

▼ And to think that people thought *Asteroids* might be harmful for young people…



UK Charts For Feb 1982

1. **Golden Brown**
   The Stranglers
2. **The Model/Computer Love**
   Kraftwerk
3. **Maid Of Orleans**
   Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark
4. **Town Called Malice/Precious**
   The Jam
5. **Oh Julie**
   Shakin' Stevens
6. **Dead Ringer For Love**
   Meat Loaf
7. **Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)**
   Christopher Cross
8. **The Lion Sleeps Tonight**
   Tight Fit
9. **Say Hello, Wave Goodbye**
   Soft Cell
10. **Love Plus One**
    Haircut 100

Top movies in America, 1982

1. **Tootsie**
   ($177,200,000)
2. **An Officer And A Gentleman**
   ($129,795,549)
3. **Rocky III**
   ($122,823,200)
4. **Porky's**
   ($105,500,000)
5. **Star Trek: The Wrath Of Khan**
   ($78,900,000)
6. **Poltergeist**
   ($76,600,000)
7. **48 Hrs.**
   ($75,900,000)
8. **The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas**
   ($69,701,637)
9. **The Verdict**
   ($54,000,000)
10. **Gandhi**
    ($52,767,889)

I·N T·H·E N·E·W·S

PIONEERING MOTOR FACTORY CALLS IN THE RECEIVERS

On 19 February 1982 the DeLorean Motor Company (DMC) went into receivership, putting an end to John DeLorean's dream of making futuristic sports cars. DMC's factory in Dunmurry, Belfast, had been subsidised by the British government as part of an effort to ease tensions in Northern Ireland by providing jobs for Protestants and Catholics. Some 2,500 people were employed at the plant, though all jobs were lost when the factory eventually closed in May.



▲ "Wow, Doc, I haven't seen one of those since 1982"

The DeLorean was immortalised in *Back To The Future* in 1985, and its distinctive gullwing doors and stainless steel finish make it a highly unusual vehicle. In 1986 John DeLorean tried to buy equipment from the closed factory so he could start making cars in the US, but the moulds for the bodywork had been broken up and were last seen being used as anchors for fishing nets in Galway Bay.



C·A·S·T·L·E O·F I·L·L·U·S·I·O·N



▼ Who'd have thought that seven tiny coloured gems could be so important…

Format: **Mega Drive**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **In-House**
Release date: **1993**

With so many of SEGA's most memorable games starting out life in the arcades, it's easy to forget that the company was also responsible for some great titles exclusively for home formats. During the Mega Drive era, for example, SEGA created a plethora of decent platform games including *Kid Chameleon*, *DecapAttack* and, of course, *Sonic The Hedgehog*. It was also during this time that the company worked on a number of Disney titles, the most memorable of which was undoubtedly *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*.

Although it was fairly short and easy to complete, this charming little game was so beautifully crafted that it was a pleasure to play through time and time again. What's more, for fans of Disney cartoons, the sumptuous visuals, cutesy sound and all-round magical atmosphere made for a particularly authentic experience – impressive, considering the game had been created by a Japanese developer.

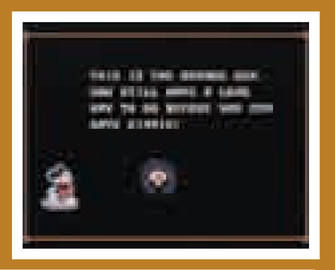
But while *Castle Of Illusion* was a class act from start to finish, the climactic journey across a rainbow to the tower where Minnie Mouse was being held captive was a great retro gaming moment that will stick in the memories of many players.

Throughout the game Mickey was awarded coloured gems each time an area was completed, though it wasn't clear why they were such an important factor in saving Minnie. Astute players may have noticed that the colour order in which they were being collected correlated with the colours of the rainbow – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet – though it wasn't until the end of the game that the relevance of this order became apparent.

You see, after the penultimate level Mickey would find himself on a rooftop with a gap of just a few metres separating him from his beloved. Of course, those little mouse legs would never be capable of making such a leap, but now he had a pocketful of magical gems that could be useful…

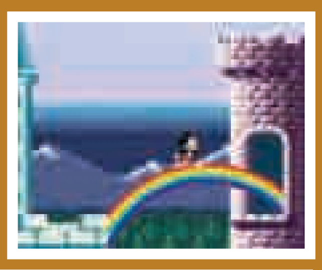
Upon reaching the edge of the roof, Mickey would instinctively throw the gems into the air, creating a magical rainbow linking the two buildings together and making a safe pathway that he could follow towards the final battle. Good luck, mouse fella.





▲ It wasn't until the very end of the game that the importance of the rainbow-coloured gems became apparent.





▲ In typical Disney style, Mickey throws the gems into the air and creates a rainbow bridge to reach the boss.

This Month's Favourites

Just a few of the classic retro titles that have been blistering our thumbs this month…

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

There's no denying that Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* looked superb on the SNES; so much so that at the unveiling people thought it was running on the N64.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV

With the new *TMNT* game on the shelves, we thought we'd revisit *Turtles In Time* on the SNES. It's still extremely playable even now.



PSYCHO FOX

A Master System platform game staring a fox should by all accounts be awful, but SEGA's *Psycho Fox* manages to compete well with its 8-bit peers.



CHU CHU ROCKET!

Even though this was developed to make the most of the Dreamcast's networking capabilities, it worked just as well offline. A flawed work of genius.





GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...

FIRE ANT

BIG ON THE UNDERGROUND GAMING SCENE

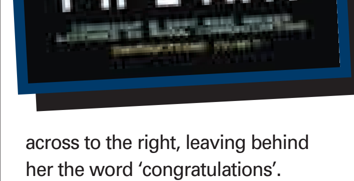
Seeing as how so many games were released for the Commodore 64, it isn't really surprising that hundreds have now been forgotten about completely; games like *Fire Ant*, which was one of ten games included with later C64 packs. If you were never lucky enough to play this enjoyable little game (which is highly likely, as no-one seems to remember it), it would be all too easy to dismiss it as yet another of the *Pac-Man* clones that were available at the time. But look beyond the undeniably similar visuals and you'll discover something a little more in-depth than Namco's classic chomp-'em-up. Following the kidnap of the queen ant, the game's hero, a regular worker ant, had to get through eight maze-like levels to find her. However, while this didn't sound overly taxing, an army of angry scorpions protecting the lair made things much more difficult. And, unlike *Pac-Man*, this progression wasn't just a case of collecting items willy nilly; levels were structured in such a way that keys had to be located in the correct order to unlock blockages in the tunnels. Of course, this was a task in itself what with all those nasties guarding them.

Just as in *Pac-Man*, though, the erratic movement of the baddies made for quite a few unfair deaths as you made your way through the game. Being pursued down a passageway to a dead end, for example, would nearly always result in a loss of life (unless the scorpion following you spontaneously decided to turn around and head back in the opposite direction – something they tended to do from time to time), while it was just as easy to get trapped between two baddies with no way out.

Of course, this wasn't a problem unique to *Fire Ant* – many C64 and Spectrum games featured similar flaws. Thankfully, the innovative ideas demonstrated throughout the game more than made up for this slight niggle. In order to get through some tunnels, for instance, you needed an oxygen bottle that lasted for just a few seconds, and it was vitally important to observe each scorpion's movements if these sections were to be passed successfully. While a certain amount of luck was always going to affect the outcome, such areas were far more skill-based, not to mention more rewarding, than *Pac-Man*.

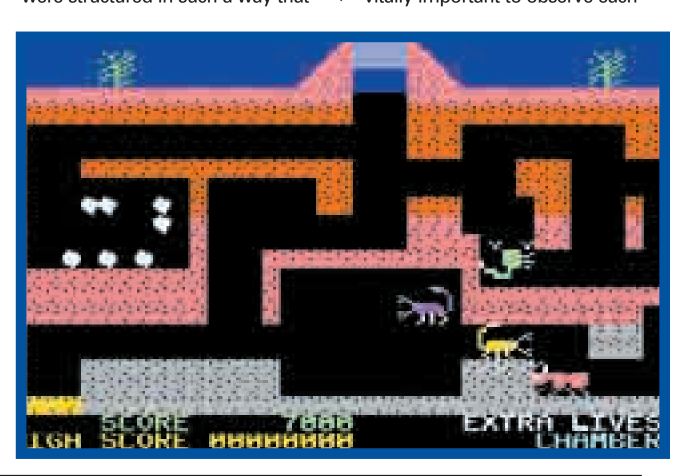
Of course, all good things come to an end, and for Fire Ant successfully locating the queen ant marked the end of his adventure. And surely after all that hard work you'd be well rewarded for your trouble, right? On the contrary, the ending was actually one of the most disappointing we've witnessed in any game. After being freed from her cell at the bottom left of the screen, the queen merely flies across to the right, leaving behind her the word 'congratulations'. Fantastic, eh? Well, it's the thought that counts…





Presentation: **50%**
Graphics: **56%%**
Playability: **83%**
Longevity: **75%**

Overall: 79%



▲ A worker spends all his time braving angry scorpions and other dangers simply to save the queen and receives no reward. *Fire Ant* as socialist discourse on the evils of a monarchist state. Discuss.



▲ Fire Ant was too busy looking at the queen's rear end to notice the imminent danger approaching. But you can hardly blame him for being sidetracked – she's quite the little anty minx, don't you think?







▲ "I'm 47, my girlfriend's 33, she's 14 years younger than me. Back of the net!"

STAR GAMES!

After bouncing back to the third best slot on Radio Norwich, Alan Partridge lets off steam with Dancing Stage Euromix and House Of The Dead 2. Cashback…

We're no strangers to the world of arcades and we've seen some strange things in our time, but the last thing you'd expect to find as you stroll through the noisy neon ballroom is a washed-up celebrity hogging all the good games. After being turned away from 'friends', clubs and parties alike, Alan Partridge goes to drown his sorrows in some digital entertainment.

The first shot we see is a close-up of Alan's face bathed in a warm, friendly glow, and as the camera pans out it becomes apparent that he's bitten off more than he can chew with a particularly tricky song on *Dancing Stage Euromix*. On closer inspection, however, the slow-moving arrows and simple pattern on the screen blow that theory out of the water and present a new one – Partridge has all the grace and quick-stepping ability of a rhino.

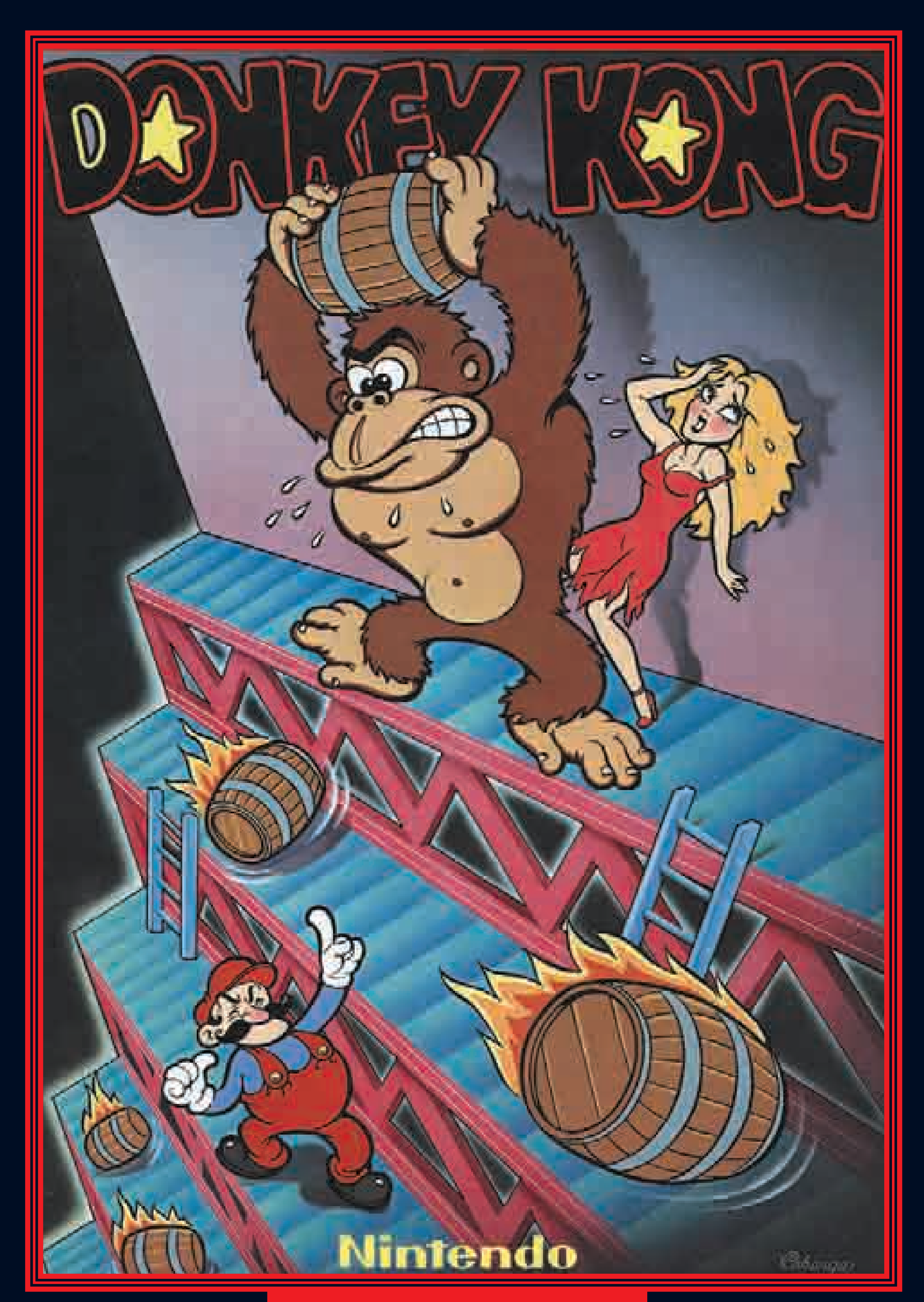
The strained stomping continues for a while before the scene cuts to the celebrity's second game of choice, *House Of The Dead 2*. There are two different shots of his undead-blasting antics: one shows Alan paired with a young boy, the two players sporting equally colourful replica pistols; while the other portrays a solo experience, spiced up with frustrated exclamations ("shitty zombies!") and the kind of flailing often seen in over-excited children.



Later in the episode, Alan proceeds to recount his gaming achievements for his new Lexus-driving friend's wife in his inimitable manner. "Tried to outdance a computer – impossible – then fought some zombies with a boy in care," he explains, adding with his trademark zing: "Wiped the floor with him."

As is almost always the way, though, a gaming faux pas manages to slip through the net. While Alan is abusing *HOTD2*'s zombies, the replica gun he's flinging around is nothing to do with SEGA, belonging, in fact, to Namco's *Crisis Zone*. We're not sure what's worse – the fact that this error made it onto national television or the fact that we recognised that blue plastic SMG within seconds…

Sadly, for the rest of Alan's television and radio career we're never given another insight into his gaming habits. Shame, really – we'd love to see him try to get to grips with an EyeToy or, better still, *Super Monkey Ball*. Anyone for Monkey Tennis?



DONKEY KONG (Arcade) Nintendo, 1981 – Original arcade flyer

Classic Machine

GAME BOY



Specifications

CPU: Z-80 8-bit Custom CPU
CPU SPEED: 4.19MHz
MEMORY: 64Kbit
RESOLUTION: 160x144
COLOUR PALETTE: 4 (Greyscale)
MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SCREENS: 4
MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SPRITES: 40
SOUND CHANNELS: 4
DIMENSIONS: 148x49x32mm
SCREEN SIZE: 2.5 inches
POWER INPUT: 6V/4 AA Batteries

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY BOXES

As with NES and SNES games, Game Boy software came packaged in cardboard boxes. Though small enough to save a few trees, the boxes were roughly 12x12cm, making them stand out just as much as all the other games on the shelves.

POCKET GAMES

Game Boy games came on little grey cartridges that were a piffling 5x5cm.

BY TODAY'S STANDARDS, THE ORIGINAL GAME BOY IS MORE A BREEZEBLOCK THAN A PORTABLE SYSTEM. BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP IT FROM APPEALING TO MORE THAN 50 MILLION GAMERS AROUND THE WORLD…

With strong NES sales around the world, and the Game & Watch range as popular as ever, the latter part of the Eighties saw Nintendo's Gunpei Yokoi and his R&D team putting together a machine that would combine the best of both worlds.

By 1987 a prototype of this revolutionary new handheld system was up and running, much to the delight of Nintendo Of Japan president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, who predicted that the company could shift a massive 25 million units within three years if the marketing was right.

Technological limitations at the time meant that the unit's visual display was monochrome and only capable of displaying four shades of grey, though through clever use of pointillism and cross-hatching it was possible for games appear far more detailed than they actually were. Nintendo's decision not to upgrade to colour was purely down to battery life; four AA batteries would give a generous eight to ten hours of gameplay, compared to around two if the machine had run in colour. Not only that, but the unit itself would have been more expensive too.

Less than two years after Yokoi-san's prototype unit was produced, the finished product, now called Game Boy, was being mass produced and many games were in development. Over the next few years, some of Nintendo's biggest

TOP LOADER

Game Boy game cartridges slotted neatly into the top of the machine. Easy, really.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Although the levels of contrast offered by the Game Boy's monochrome display were minimal, the problem was made worse by the amount of light required for viewing. Unless you were playing in direct sunlight or had access to a bright artificial light, Game Boy games could be unplayable at times. Thankfully, Nintendo (as well as a number of other companies) got around the problem by releasing clip-on lights, some of which included magnifiers to make the screen brighter, bigger and clearer. Later, Nintendo also introduced a backlit version of the Game Boy Pocket, though it was never released outside Japan.



▲ A bit cumbersome, but perhaps worth it for the sake of your eyesight.

SIZE MATTERS

Scaled down by a third, Nintendo's Game Boy Pocket was introduced in 1996 and offered more than ten hours' of gaming from just two AAA batteries. The screen, though still monochrome and the same size as the standard model, was improved, offering better contrast and definition. Tragically, Gunpei Yokoi didn't live to see the machine's continued success as he was killed in a traffic accident shortly after the GB Pocket's launch.



NES CONTROLS

Considering the NES was Nintendo's home console when the Game Boy was released, it's not surprising the machines have similar controls.

NINTENDO'S EYETOY

During a particularly quiet period for the Game Boy, Nintendo released the quirky Game Boy Camera. This innovative little device clipped into the cartridge port and allowed gamers to take low-res photos that could be manipulated on the monochrome screen. A portable printer was also available, allowing Game Boy photographers to produce stickers of their creations. The Game Boy Camera, combined with the introduction of Pokémon, helped to resurrect public interested in the system.

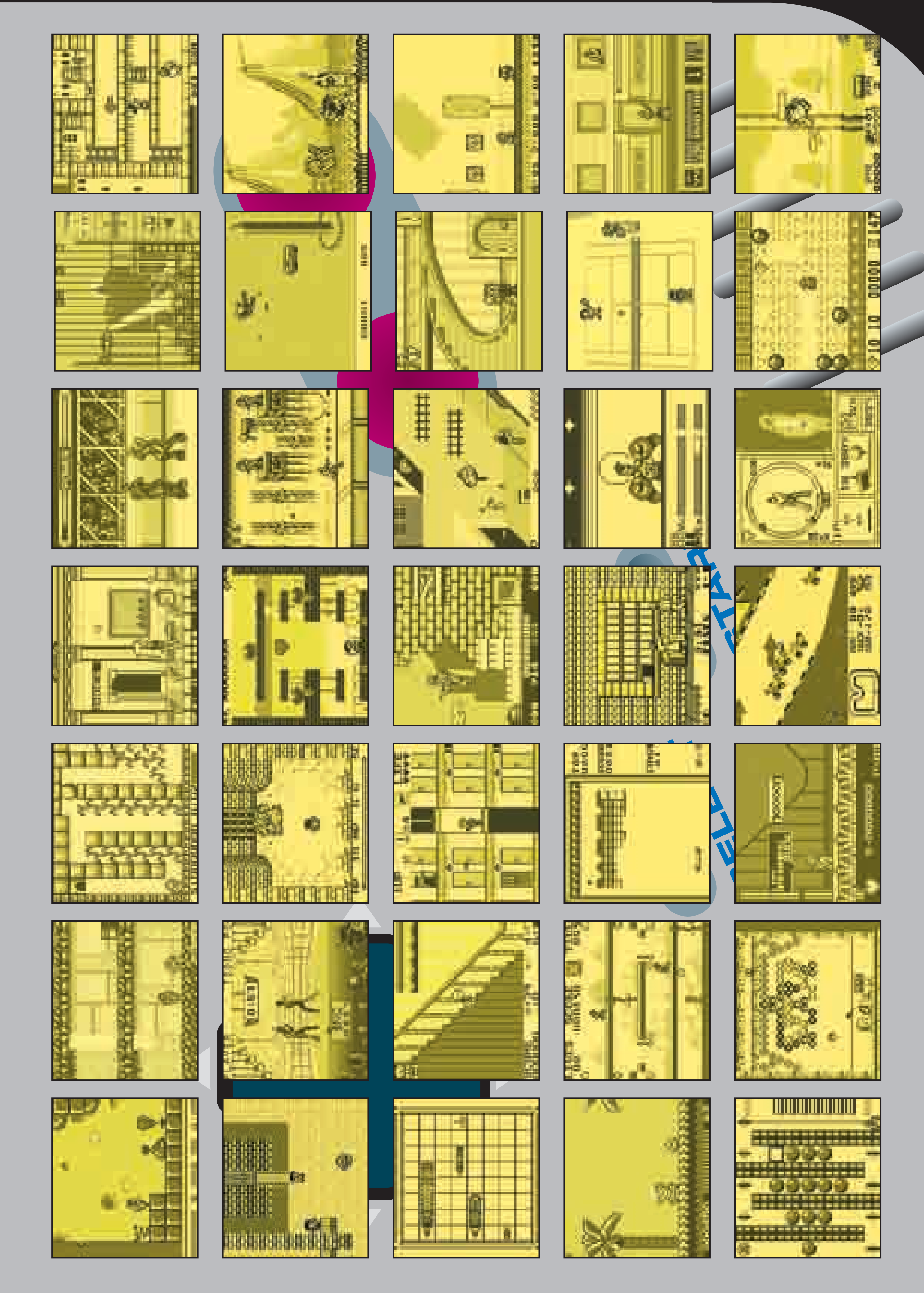
franchises would make their way to the format, including *Mario* and *Zelda*, but the game that made all the difference was *Tetris*, a simple puzzle game invented by Russian mathematician Alexey Pajitnov. Thanks to the simplicity of this world-famous game, consumers everywhere were attracted to the versatile handheld. Amazingly, sales were even higher than Yamauchi-san's initial predictions, with a massive 32 million units shifted within the first three years.

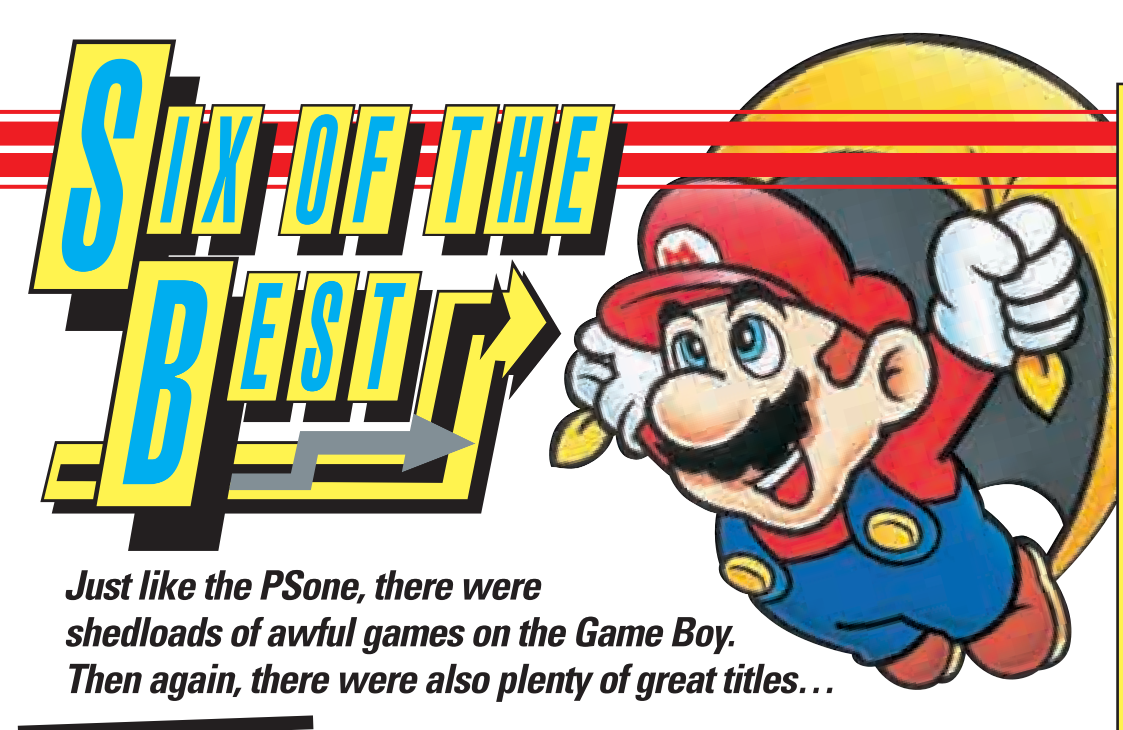
"WHY I LOVE MY GAME BOY"

In cars, on buses, in school libraries, on family holidays… anywhere where tedium threatened, the Game Boy was a lifeline. It offered all the excitement of a 'proper' console without having to hog the TV, and there's still something appealing about the machine's design – reassuringly chunky yet still stylish enough to make you want to pick one up. You can stick your fancy GBA SP…

Charlotte Martyn


Classic Machine
Nintendo GAME BOY™





Just like the PSone, there were shedloads of awful games on the Game Boy. Then again, there were also plenty of great titles…



Zelda: Link's Awakening

Publisher: Nintendo **Year:** 1993

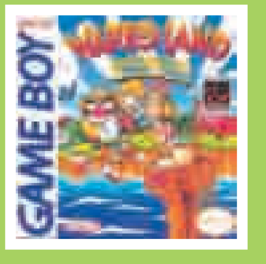
As the Game Boy matured, Nintendo developed new development tools, making longer titles (such as RPGs) more feasible on the hardware. In 1993, after a few years of research, the company produced a superb version of *Zelda* entitled *Link's Awakening*. Set on Koholint Island, the game sees Link trying to get back to Hyrule before being shipwrecked and caught up in the mysterious occurrences on the island. One of the best in the series.



Super Mario 3: Wario Land

Publisher: Nintendo **Year:** 1994

Having introduced Wario as the bad guy in *Mario Land 2*, Nintendo tried something new with the third game in the series. Rather than playing as Mario, you were Wario, who controlled similarly to the Italian plumber himself, but also had a dash that could take out enemies and smash through walls. With some of the cleverest puzzles seen in a game of this type, *Wario Land* has become a series in its own right, complementing the more action-based *Mario Land* games.



Metroid II: Return Of Samus

Publisher: Nintendo **Year:** 1992

Released in 1992, this really is starting to show its age, though at the time it was rather good. As the second instalment in the *Metroid* series, the game does a good job of mimicking the NES original, though the lack of colours meant that many backgrounds were simply blacked out. But this doesn't affect the gameplay, and although newer titles – such as *Super Metroid* and *Metroid Fusion* – have eclipsed *Return Of Samus*, it's still worth playing if you're a fan.

Donkey Kong Land

Publisher: Nintendo **Year:** 1995

Following Rare's beautiful *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES, the company developed a version for the Game Boy. Using the Advanced Computer Graphics Modelling system that had been used to create the Super Nintendo game, Rare was able to mimic the original title pretty well, despite only having four shades of grey to work with. Thankfully, the gameplay is decent, even by today's standards, and the game comes on a banana-coloured cartridge.





Super Mario Land

Publisher: Nintendo

Year: 1989

As one of the first Game Boy games released, *Super Mario Land*'s visuals have dated considerably; the sprites are miniscule and there's very little detail in the backgrounds. That said, this 15-year-old title is far more faithful to the *Mario* series than the likes of *Luigi's Mansion* and *Super Mario Sunshine*, despite lacking the precise gameplay of many of its console counterparts. *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, released three years later, was beefed up considerably, and as a result was far more impressive visually.



Pokémon Red/Blue

Publisher: Nintendo

Year: 1996

There's no denying that the Pokémon craze has snowballed in recent years. In fact, for Nintendo it's pretty much single-handedly kept the company afloat in a market dominated by Sony. It's not very hard to see why – the games are actually very playable, not to mention addictive. Just in case you haven't had the opportunity to sample them, the premise is simply to capture a selection of Pokémon (Pocket Monsters) from their natural habitats, train them up, and battle them against other characters or human players via system link. The ads were true – you have got to catch 'em all…

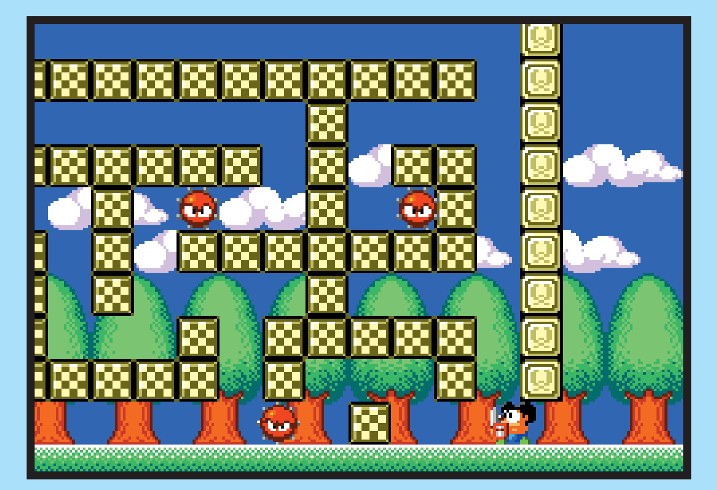


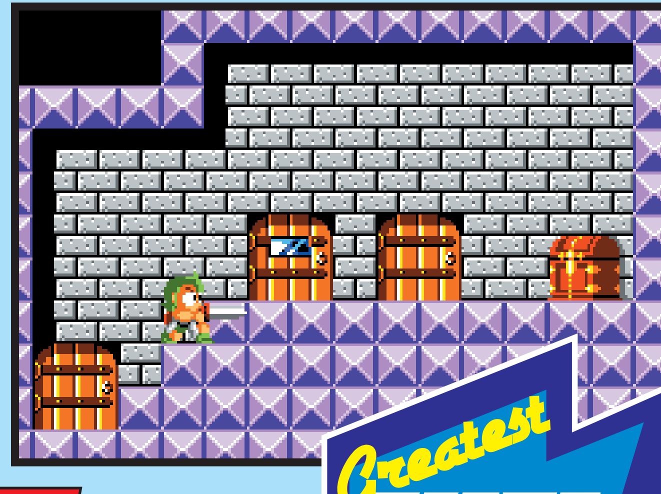
KILLER INSTINCT GOLD (Nintendo 64) Rare, 1996 – UK advertisement





"You must defeat my Dragon Punch to stand a chance"





Greatest RETRO Game Ever

W•O•N•D•E•R B•O•Y III

T•H•E D•R•A•G•O•N•S T•R•A•P

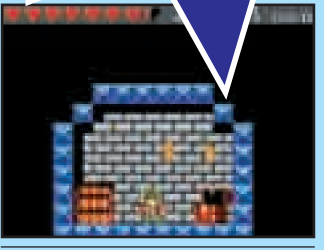
He may have started off life as a skateboarding, hammer-throwing hooligan, but SEGA's Wonder Boy proved that not only was he made of much sterner stuff, but he could also give a certain Mario a run for his money. Eschewing the traditional platform elements of the original 1986 outing, the Master System's third *Wonder Boy* title was a glorious sprawling adventure that had more than a hint of RPG goodness.

Following immediately on from *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, our intrepid hero had slain the evil Meka Dragon in order to restore peace to a ravaged Wonder Land. Unfortunately, defeating the dastardly reptile unleashed a curse that turned Wonder Boy into a miniature fire-breathing dragon (no doubt complete with a serious halitosis problem). Stoically receiving his new humiliating form, Wonder Boy quickly headed off through some wonderfully bright Day-Glo landscapes (which really showed off SEGA's 8-bit machine) in order to track down Meka Dragon's various cousins and hopefully lift that curse once and for all.

Unsurprisingly, things weren't quite that simple and a quick exploration of your surroundings soon revealed that various routes were blocked off. Fortunately, the demise of each impressive-looking but poorly animated Dragon you encountered enabled you to shift form into a variety of different animals, which in turn opened up those previously locked and tantalisingly out-of-reach paths.

Along the way, Wonder Boy was able to collect a variety of power-ups that let him annihilate an increasing array of oh-so-cute enemies, as well as collecting money to buy health and numerous items from the many shops that were dotted throughout the landscape. Add to this plenty of secret rooms, unlockable chests and those devious Dragons (not to mention an excellently designed game world) and it's pretty easy to see why this was rightly hailed as one of the best Master System games ever created.





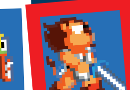
▲ When *Zelda* met *Mario*? It's not what it seems…



▲ As the titular Wonder Boy you were able to adopt different guises to use a range of powers.

Animal Magic

Pick a form, any form…



Wonder Boy

Stout of heart and green of hair, you initially played Wonder Boy in the *Dragon's Trap* prelude. However, if you're sneaky like us, you simply used the We5t 0Ne password to unlock him.

Lizard Man

Don't let this cute-looking fellow fool you, as Lizard Man's fiery breath was a force to be reckoned with. You'd spend the majority of your time as Lizard Man, so you had to master his abilities quickly.

Mouse Man

Now this is more like it. Being able to stick to walls was Mouse Man's speciality and it came in extremely handy once you uncovered the Mummy Dragon's deadly pyramid.

Fish Man

With so much of Monster Land consisting of water – though strangely, each character could breathe in it – Fish Man's manoeuvrability became essential.

Lion Man

Unlike every other character in the game, Lion Man was able to use a nifty downwards sword swipe, making him essential for getting to those hard-to-reach areas.

Hawk Man

Though much weaker than his animal peers, Hawk Man's ability to fly through most of Monster Land was essential. Once he was unlocked, the end of the game was soon in sight.

Look Back in Anger

Before Tomb Raider, Core Design was best known for a platform romp in which a caveman named Chuck Rock could, er, chuck rocks…

The 16-bit era was a great time for people who enjoyed playing platform games – pretty much every other title fitted into this packed genre, many of them featuring some sort of cutesy animal jumping over holes and stomping on the heads of bad guys. Of course, not all platform games starred animals – many featured humanoid characters such as Mario, Wonder Boy and Mega Man, some of whom were more recognisable than the likes of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

Unfortunately, for every decent game character design, there were twice as many duff ones (much like today, in fact); duffs like Chuck Rock, which thought they were being rather clever, but really weren't at all.

As the name would suggest, Chuck Rock's 'thing' was his ability to hurl rocks at bad guys or onto seesaws to catapult himself into the air. The generic levels were infested with dinosaurs and irritating little mutant creatures that would leap out from behind foliage or run back and forth taking Chuck's life away. And because Chuck was so slow and cumbersome, such annoying little foes could easily remove a fair portion of your life before you could get into position to throw a rock.

On top of everything else, there was the laughable Chuck Rock band which played the theme tune on the title screen and looked a little like a bunch of rejected character designs from *The Flintstones* or *Captain Caveman*. In fact, it seemed fairly obvious that Core really wanted the game to be like a Hanna-Barbera cartoon, right down to the comedy sound effects and gruff voice of Chuck himself.

But while many were dazzled by the game's glossy presentation and quirky humour, those of us who were more discerning could see *Chuck Rock* for what it really was – a mediocre, repetitive, unfair and unappealing piece of software with very few redeeming features.

▲ The Flintstones they ain't. The Chuck Rock band were a bad start to a bad game.



It may have had multiple passengers, new cars and a crazy jump, but it wasn't as much fun as its predecessor

The original *Crazy Taxi* was first shown at the unveiling of SEGA's Naomi arcade board, though at the time the taxi theme was still being developed. Even so, the sense of vibrancy, texture and light was already apparent as swarms of vividly coloured vehicles zipped around city streets.

Technically impressive as the piece of programming was, though, it was the sheer genius design of the finished game that made *Crazy Taxi* the massive hit it was. Set in San Francisco, the track featured massively elevated road sections, a beach, freeway and bustling city centre, each offering the player something new to look at. Of course, a sequel was always going to happen after such a monumental game but, unfortunately, despite SEGA's best efforts to make the follow-up even slicker, it somehow managed to miss the point entirely.

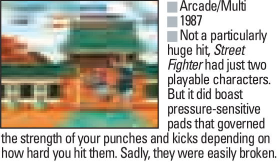
With the location moved east to New York, the most obvious problem with *Crazy Taxi 2* was how dull the scenery was; gone was the larger-than-life California ambience, replaced with flat city streets and repetitive grey skyscrapers. A new jump manoeuvre had been added to make the most of short cuts, but unlike the existing special moves (such as the Crazy Drift, which required a little skill to perform), the Crazy Jump was achieved simply by pressing a single button. To make matters worse, the jump looked so ridiculous that it even seemed out of place in a game as extreme as *Crazy Taxi*.

The final new feature was the ability to pick up multiple passengers at once – something that encouraged the player to plan their route around the level carefully. Unfortunately, this turned a game that had started out as a simplistic, enjoyable and actually rather skill-based affair, into a somewhat awkward, over-complicated niche product for hardcore SEGA fans only.



▲ *Crazy Taxi 2*'s New York setting was dull and lifeless compared to the Californian home of the first game.

STREET FIGHTER



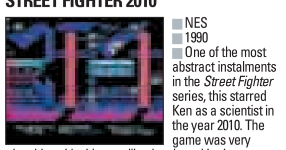
- Arcade/Multi
- 1987
- Not a particularly huge hit, *Street Fighter* had just two playable characters. But it did boast pressure-sensitive pads that governed the strength of your punches and kicks depending on how hard you hit them. Sadly, they were easily broken.

POCKET

STREET FIGHTER II

- Game Boy
- 1995
- Despite its monochrome display, Nintendo's chunky little handheld actually did quite a good job of recreating the arcade original. Sadly, a lack of animation made the action look somewhat jerky and fragmented.

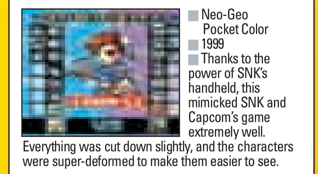
STREET FIGHTER 2010





- NES
- 1990
- One of the most abstract instalments in the *Street Fighter* series, this starred Ken as a scientist in the year 2010. The game was very playable, with side-scrolling levels and intricate combat that allowed interaction with the scenery.

SNK VS. CAPCOM: MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM



- Neo-Geo Pocket Color
- 1999
- Thanks to the power of SNK's handheld, this mimicked SNK and Capcom's game extremely well. Everything was cut down slightly, and the characters were super-deformed to make them easier to see.

MANGA

CUTESY

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR

- Arcade/Multi
- 1991
- This was the title that propelled the *Street Fighter* series into the limelight. With eight playable characters, plenty of balanced moves, locations all around the world, and a decent home conversion on the SNES, this was a classic.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: TURBO REVIVAL

- GBA
- 2001
- With ropey controls and awful music, this was a real low point for the series, especially as the SNES and Mega Drive conversions were so much better. This also featured an uncomfortable mix of *Super* and *Alpha* art styles.

SNK VS. CAPCOM CARD FIGHTERS CLASH

- Neo-Geo Pocket Color
- 1999
- SNK capitalised on the *Pokémon*-induced trading-card craze with release of the *SNK Vs. Capcom Card Fighter's Clash* series. Three variations were available and the action was strictly turn-based card battling.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA



- GBC
- 2000
- Despite being a competent machine, the Game Boy Color couldn't do justice to a game that was famous for its manga-style characters. British developer Crawfish had used all the power available, however, and this was still very playable.

POCKET FIGHTER

- Wonderswan
- 2000
- Although Bandai's Wonderswan was never available in the UK, it built up quite a following in Japan. Capcom's cutesy beat-'em-up, *Pocket Fighter*, translated well to the machine, though it was only available in monochrome.

STREET FIGHTER II: CHAMPION EDITION

- Arcade/Multi
- 1992
- This was almost the same as *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, though there were slight tweaks and players were now allowed to use the four boss characters. Each of the backgrounds had also been updated with new colours.

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO: HYPER FIGHTING

- Arcade/Multi
- 1992
- Many fans consider this the best in the series thanks to its speed and combos. Nintendo signed the game as a SNES exclusive, but Capcom got around the deal by simply renaming it *Special Champion Edition* for the Mega Drive.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3



- GBA
- 2002
- The GBA conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* was stunning. With 38 playable fighters, sublime animation and flawless control, it was a real shame to see Crawfish go bankrupt after such a great translation.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE TOURNAMENT BATTLE

- Arcade
- 1993
- With four arcade cabinets linked together, *The Tournament Battle* allowed eight players to test their skills. Unfortunately, players had to move between machines between fights meaning that any credits in the machine were lost.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS

- Arcade/Multi
- 1993
- Featuring four new fighters – Cammy, T. Hawk, Fei Long and Dee Jay – *Super Street Fighter* was supposed to be the next evolution in the series. However, the speed had been reduced dramatically and fans weren't impressed.

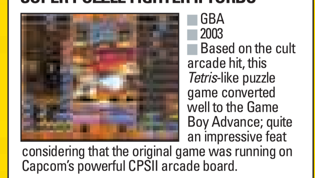
SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

- Arcade/Multi
- 1994
- After so many complaints about the speed of *Super Street Fighter*, Capcom hurriedly addressed the problem as well as introducing super moves just like those in *Darkstalkers* (which was also released in 1994).

DARKSTALKERS

- Arcade/Multi
- 1994
- Showcasing Capcom's new manga art style, *Darkstalkers* was a test game for *Street Fighter Alpha*. Featuring air blocking and super moves, this played a lot like *Street Fighter* (apart from its numerous enhancements, obviously).

SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER II TURBO



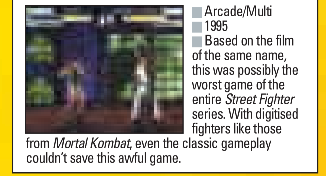
- GBA
- 2003
- Based on the cult arcade hit, this *Tetris*-like puzzle game converted well to the Game Boy Advance; quite an impressive feat considering that the original game was running on Capcom's powerful CPSII arcade board.

CUTESY

3D

VERSUS

STREET FIGHTER THE MOVIE

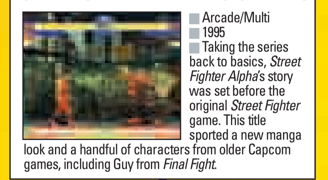


- Arcade/Multi
- 1995
- Based on the film of the same name, this was possibly the worst game of the entire *Street Fighter* series. With digitised fighters like those from *Mortal Kombat*, even the classic gameplay couldn't save this awful game.

NIGHT WARRIORS: DARKSTALKERS' REVENGE

- Arcade/Multi
- 1995
- Like *SFII: Champion Edition*, this was merely an upgrade of *Darkstalkers* with remixed colours and playable boss characters. By now, popular fighters like Demitri and Morrigan were becoming an established part of the series.

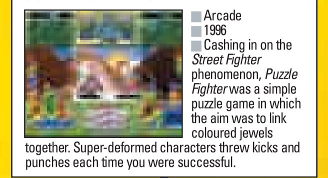
STREET FIGHTER ALPHA: WARRIORS' DREAMS



- Arcade/Multi
- 1995
- Taking the series back to basics, *Street Fighter Alpha's* story was set before the original *Street Fighter* game. This title sported a new manga look and a handful of characters from older Capcom games, including Guy from *Final Fight*.

Fifteen years old and apparently still going strong – the Street Fighter series has a long and distinguished family tree...

SUPER PUZZLE FIGHTER



Arcade
1996
Cashing in on the *Street Fighter* phenomenon, *Puzzle Fighter* was a simple puzzle game in which the aim was to link coloured jewels together. Super-deformed characters threw kicks and punches each time you were successful.

POCKET FIGHTER

Arcade/Multi
1997
Taking the super-deformed characters from *Super Puzzle Fighter* and blending them with the traditional *Street Fighter* gameplay, this cutesy one-on-one beat-'em-up was a nice variation on the standard game.

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION

PS2/Arcade
2003
Featuring all the moves and characters from *SFII: The World Warrior, Champion Edition, Turbo: Hyper Fighting, Super SFII* and *Super SFII Turbo*, this should be the definitive pack for all *Street Fighter* fans. You win!

STREET FIGHTER EX



Arcade/PSone
1996
This was Capcom's attempt to take *Street Fighter* into three dimensions, and despite a lot of attention *EX* lacked the precision or responsiveness of its predecessors. Worse still, a lack of polygons meant the fighters looked blocky.

STREET FIGHTER EX 2

Arcade/PSone
1998
After the disappointingly geometric *Street Fighter EX*, the sequel to Capcom's 3D beat-'em-up was certainly far prettier, boasting many additional polygons. Unfortunately, the gameplay was just as spongy and unresponsive.

STREET FIGHTER EX 3

PS2
2000
Like many PS2 launch titles, this really didn't show off what Sony's new machine was capable of. With garish graphics, slowdown aplenty and questionable dynamics, this really wasn't any better than its predecessors.

X-MEN VS. STREET FIGHTER



Arcade/Multi
1996
After successfully bringing the X-Men to life in *Children Of The Atom*, Capcom spiced things up with the introduction of *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*. The game allowed you to choose two fighters and switch between them mid-match.

MARVEL SUPER HEROES VS. STREET FIGHTER

Arcade/Multi
1997
Following on from *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*, this offered the same two-on-two gameplay with a selection of new characters. However, while the gameplay was just as good the backgrounds weren't as creative or polished.

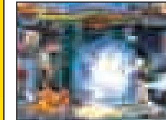
MARVEL VS. CAPCOM

Arcade/Multi
1998
Continuing the now popular two-on-two gameplay of the *Vs.* series, *Marvel Vs. Capcom* expanded the formula by offering a wider range of characters, including an enormous selection from Capcom's impressive history.

CAPCOM VS. SNK

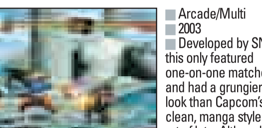
Arcade/Multi
2000
Teaming up with long-term rival SNK, this Capcom offering allowed players to match up fighters from their favourite SNK and Capcom series. This really kept 2D fighting games alive in a 3D-dominated market.

CAPCOM VS. SNK 2



Arcade/Multi
2001
Although this didn't really offer anything new, the fact that it's been translated to so many formats has helped to keep Capcom's 2D games in the limelight. Sadly, the standard controls have been simplified, though they can be adjusted.

SNK VS. CAPCOM CHAOS



Arcade/Multi
2003
Developed by SNK, this only featured one-on-one matches and had a grungier look than Capcom's clean, manga style art of late. Although appreciated by SNK fans, the company has produced better-quality games in the past.

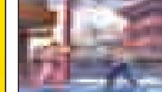
VAMPIRE SAVIOR

Arcade/Multi
1997
The third and final instalment in the *Darkstalkers* series, this featured some new characters and moves. Several Japanese arcades featured an updated version (*Vampire Savior 2*), while the SEGA Saturn received a superb conversion.

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2

Arcade/Multi
1999
More of the same, *Marvel Vs. Capcom 2* arrived in the arcade just one year after its predecessor and was converted to the Dreamcast. More recently, the game appeared on the Xbox and a Live-enabled version is expected soon.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2



Arcade/Multi
1996
Despite its revamped look, the original *Alpha* game only featured a handful of characters and backgrounds. *Alpha 2* rectified this somewhat and looked even more beautiful thanks to additional detail and animation.

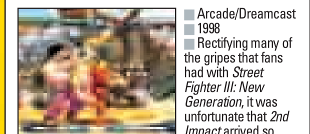
STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

Arcade/Multi
1998
With just about every *Street Fighter* character included, this was the definitive game in the *Alpha* series. Unfortunately, while it played well and looked fantastic, the musical compositions were mostly bland and uninspired.

STREET FIGHTER III: NEW GENERATION

Arcade/Dreamcast
1997
Despite its stunning animation and clever parrying system, *Street Fighter III* wasn't particularly well received due to its lacklustre line-up of characters and the removal of certain special moves.

STREET FIGHTER III: 2ND IMPACT



Arcade/Dreamcast
1998
Rectifying many of the gripes that fans had with *Street Fighter III: New Generation*, it was unfortunate that *2nd Impact* arrived so close to *Alpha 3*. This and its predecessor were available in a Dreamcast double pack.

STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE



Arcade/Dreamcast
1999
With a far healthier range of characters, improved backgrounds and tighter gameplay, Capcom finally got it right with *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. Sadly, it arrived so late in the series that gamers had moved on to titles like *Tekken*.



Why Don't They Remake...

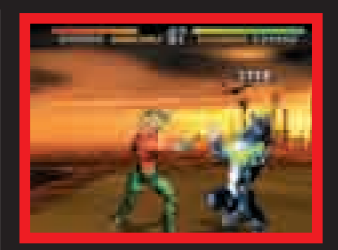
KILLER INSTINCT

IS THIS THE MOST COMBO-HEAVY FIGHTER EVER?

Released: **1994**
Publisher: **Midway, Nintendo**
Developer: **Rare**
Format: **Arcade, SNES, N64**

If you were the same kind of youth that most of us were back in the mid-Nineties (the kind that spent more time hanging around arcades and darkened computer shops rather than college), it would have been hard to avoid the arrival of *Killer Instinct* in your local arcade. Taking advantage of the prevailing 2D beat-'em-up trend, it was a game that didn't just attract your attention with a booming voice that issued forth from the machine's speakers (declaring it would be one of the first games for the Ultra 64 in 1995, no less), it also featured some of the shiniest rendered graphics we'd ever seen.

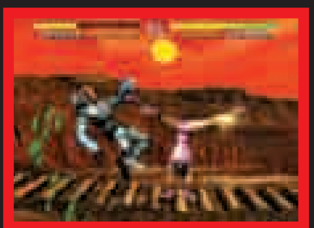
However, it wasn't just the loud noises and snazzy visuals that drew the crowds; if you really knew what you were doing, people would be queuing up to watch you play. You see, despite having many of the obvious elements that made up the majority of beat-'em-ups at the time (varied characters, special moves, finishers and the like), *Killer Instinct*'s heavy emphasis on combination attacks made it a title for the more dedicated arcade gamer. Go into a battle without even the slightest grasp of the combo system – which ranged from simple 'medium punches link into heavy kicks' attacks to insanely long move chains that required perfect timing and execution – against someone who knew their onions and you didn't stand a chance.



You could mash the buttons and perform rudimentary special attacks all you wanted but it was only through perfectly memorising the key combos that victory, and the respect of your fellow arcade goers, could really be earned. And that's where the sheer pleasure of *Killer Instinct* lay – the ability to know that you were better than your opponent (be they computer, unsuspecting arcade newcomer or seasoned veteran) and then grind them into the dirt with your superior moves. Sure, so maybe that meant that it was a rather elitist game – with the internet being far more limited back then, discovering the moves was a lot tougher – but that only added to the game's appeal, if only because it meant you were something special to be good at it… in your own head, at least.







▲ Of all the characters available, B. Orchid proved to be among the most popular. Whether that was down to her ease of use or the fact that her chest bounced around like crazy remains a mystery…

Of course, anyone who's visited Rare's website will know that the pressure from gamers for a third title in the series is still strong. This is interesting, considering that when *Killer Instinct* first came out Rare had yet to prove itself as the fine developer that many know it to be today (thanks to games like *GoldenEye* and *Banjo-Kazooie*). Despite refusing to budge on the issue since the horribly disappointing *Killer Instinct Gold* on the N64, Rare is perhaps slowly starting to consider resurrecting this great series. This might not be a bad move for Microsoft either – after all, the result isn't likely to be worse than *Kakuto Chojin* now, is it?

THE COUP DE GRACE

If you wanted to put the exclamation mark on your victory when playing *Killer Instinct* it wasn't done through the rudimentary No Mercy moves but with an Ultra – a final move tacked onto the end of a regular combo that sent your character into overdrive with a flurry of kicks and punches, allowing you to reach up to an impressive (at the time) 41 hits in a single combo. The best thing about it was that the game did all of the work while you could take your hands off the controls and use them to point at your beaten opponent while laughing. Satisfying? Oh, you'd better believe it…





GREAT GAME BOSSES



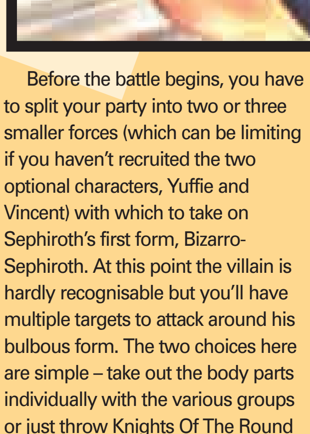
CALL US PREDICTABLE BUT SURELY THIS IS ONE OF THE BEST SHOWDOWNS IN GAMING?

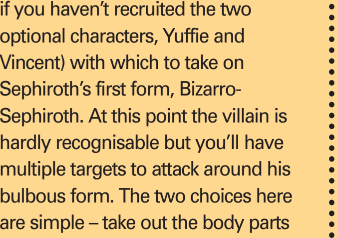
FINAL FANTASY VII - SEPHIROTH

Whether you put it down to experience, intuition or just good old-fashioned luck, Squaresoft has been responsible for some of the best videogaming villains an RPG can offer. From the cackling Kefka to time-travelling witches and all manner of spellcasters, summoners and huge abominations, the twisting narratives seem to build the bad guys' characters far better than most developers could dream of doing. Among them all, though, there's one particular foe that stands out…

Having pursued and evaded Sephiroth through two discs, on the third and final disc of the epic adventure you're dropped into the Northern Cave, a place teeming with tough enemies. Battling through these, you make your way down deep into the core of the planet, moving ever closer to the titanic clash that lies in wait at the bottom.







Before the battle begins, you have to split your party into two or three smaller forces (which can be limiting if you haven't recruited the two optional characters, Yuffie and Vincent) with which to take on Sephiroth's first form, Bizarro-Sephiroth. At this point the villain is hardly recognisable but you'll have multiple targets to attack around his bulbous form. The two choices here are simple – take out the body parts individually with the various groups or just throw Knights Of The Round at him a few times to wipe out the lot.

As Bizzaro falls, the screen darkens and the Latin chanting begins, cueing the entrance of the angelic-looking Safer-Sephiroth. If you can survive his Super Nova attack (blowing up a sun does seem a little drastic, don't you think?), outlive the pain of Shadow Flare and keep your cool in the midst of one of the most intense battles in gaming, this epic slogging match should sway in your favour.

With two suitably menacing forms of the ultimate bad guy already dispatched, it falls on beloved hero Cloud Strife to seal the deal in a one-on-one duel. Given the taxing nature of the tasks that have gone before, this is remarkably simple and is more a gratifying end to this nemesis than anything else. The spiky-haired hero is given his ultimate Limit Break Omnislash for this fight whether he's learnt it or not, meaning that Sephiroth's end is suitably painful.

In true Square tradition, this victory triggers a beautiful and lengthy cinematic cut-scene that rounds off the adventure and reminds you that perhaps those 80 hours of your life weren't wasted after all…

LAST MONTH'S SEGA GAME GEAR SCREENSHOTS

How many of these Game Gear titles did you get to play before the batteries ran out?

FIRST ROW
Ronald McDonald In Magical World
Shining Force Gaiden
Crystal Warriors
GP Rider
Aerial Assault
Godzilla
Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade
Dunk Kids
The Ottifants
PGA Tour '96

SECOND ROW
Puyo Puyo
Paperboy
Defenders Of Oasis
Eternal Legend
Lemmings
Chuck Rock
Krusty's Fun House
Dragon Crystal
The Lion King
Sonic The Hedgehog

THIRD ROW
Primal Rage
NBA Jam
Road Rash
Strider Returns
Ninja Gaiden
Smash TV
Formula 1
Battletoads
OutRun
Ristar The Shooting Star

FOURTH ROW
Sonic Drift
Land Of Illusion
Aladdin
Fatal Fury Special
Lunar
Space Harrier
Panzer Dragoon Mini
Fantasy Zone
Double Dragon
Zool

FIFTH ROW
Sonic The Hedgehog 2
Cool Spot
Green Dog
Columns
Dynamite Headdy
Pac-Man
Baku Baku Animal
Ecco The Dolphin
Lucky Dime Caper
Magical Knight Rayearth

SIXTH ROW
F-15 Strike Eagle
Slider
Streets Of Rage
Chakan
Gun Star Heroes
Mega Man
Galaga '91
Sonic The Hedgehog Triple Trouble
Samurai Shodown
Desert Speedtrap

SEVENTH ROW
Bram Stoker's Dracula
Earthworm Jim
Bust-A-Move
Robocop
Marko's Magic Football
Ax Battler
Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
FIFA International Soccer
Super Monaco GP
Sonic Chaos



GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT… GAMES TH

STARFOX 2 [SNES]

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT… GAMES T

Some games come out in Japan but never get translated to English, while others are released in arcades, but never get converted to home consoles. And others, like Nintendo's Starfox 2, never even make it out of production…

Title: **Starfox 2**
Developer: **Nintendo**
Format: **SNES**
Release date: **1995 (Cancelled)**

During the difficult transition from 2D to 3D during the mid-Nineties, Nintendo found itself in an awkward situation. The company was having trouble finishing its N64 hardware and its competitors already had powerful consoles on the market that had mastered 3D visuals. With its new console still some way off, Nintendo had no choice but to continue supporting the 16-bit SNES, which was starting to show its age.

However, thanks to British company Argonaut, the system had been given a boost in the form of the Super FX chip. This inexpensive component could easily be fitted into regular SNES cartridges and enabled developers to manipulate simple polygonal environments. Used in *Starfox* (*Starwing*), *Stunt Race FX* and *Yoshi's Island*, it was obvious just how much difference the chip could make to SNES software, and with *Starfox* being so popular it wasn't surprising that Nintendo decided to produce a sequel.

In 1995, *Starfox 2* was in the final stages of bug testing; promotional material had gone out and, aside from a few glitches, the code was complete. It was a shock, then, when the game was abruptly cancelled, apparently due to the fact that directors at Nintendo had requested that the team working on it began development of an N64 version of *Starfox* immediately.

Strangely, *Starfox 64* (*Lylat Wars*) was very similar to the original game with none of the enhancements that had been made to the abandoned SNES sequel. There were two new characters named Miyu and Faye in *Starfox 2*, for example, and rather than have the whole *Starfox* team working together, you had to choose a single wingman from the six on offer before the start of each mission. Such features have, so far, never been included in a *Starfox* game, and judging by what we've seen of the new Namco game on the GameCube they're unlikely to be included in the next one either…



▲ Look – it's practically finished, so why on earth weren't we allowed to get our hands on *Starfox 2*?

HAVEN'T WE MET BEFORE?

EVER HAD THAT FEELING THAT YOU'VE ALREADY PLAYED A GAME, EVEN THOUGH YOU KNOW YOU HAVEN'T? LIKE BUBSY…

Everyone knows *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The Mega Drive game, released in 1991, was hailed as a classic thanks to its unique, lightning-fast gameplay. Of course, something like *Mario* wouldn't have worked at such speed – it was only because Sonic effectively crashed into enemies to kill them that the game was as playable as it was. Sadly, not every games company appreciated the balance of Yuji Naka's sublime creation, and in 1994, *Test Drive* developer Accolade had a go at releasing its own speedy platform game.

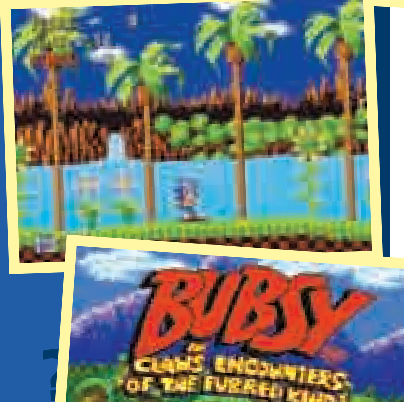
Entitled *Bubsy In Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind*, the lead character – a bobcat, of all things – was obviously influenced by Sonic, though the design was much more Western.

Bubsy attacked enemies by stomping on their heads, but because of the ridiculous speed and cluttered levels it was far too easy to run into a bad guy before you'd even noticed he was there.

To make matters worse, there were no magic mushrooms or protective gold rings to collect, meaning that just a single hit would result in you being cast back to the beginning of the level or the nearest checkpoint.

But the crème de la crème of crappiness came in the form of Bubsy's voice, which was possibly the most annoying set of videogame soundbites ever to be recorded. Bubsy, you're not Sonic, so you'd best stop trying.







TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (Arcade) Konami, 1989 – Original arcade flyer



BOXING CLEVER?

Street Fighter – the world's greatest beat-'em-up franchise, but you wouldn't always know it by looking at the box art…

Since the days of the C64 and Spectrum, publishers have always used box art to sell their games, and just like every work of art, the style and quality of the pieces produced can vary wildly from title to title. In fact, we sometimes wonder what publishers are thinking when they give the go ahead to some covers – surely something with a better-quality finish is going to appeal far more than something that looks half-hearted, after all.

While it isn't true all of the time, the most creative game boxes tend to come from Japan. Western box art is usually quite representative of the game inside, while the Japanese often use more abstract styles to advertise the product to the consumer. It's not unusual in Japan, for example, to see game boxes featuring intricate manga cartoon characters or high-quality fine art alongside packets that use CG renders, photography or mixed media. Of course, when many of these games are later translated into English, Western publishers feel that they have to adjust what's on the cover to make it more acceptable to European and American gamers. Unfortunately, things don't always work out for the better.

With Capcom's superb *Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition* taking up so much of our time this month, we thought we'd take a look back at some of the box art created especially for this wonderful series of games. Predictably, the Japanese art is, on the whole, far more beautiful than that created in America, but that's not to say that every piece is a Turner Prize winner…









SF Zero 3

FORMAT: Dreamcast
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1999
■ The style of this box art is certainly novel, though it perhaps isn't ideal for a fighting game. With its bright colours and soft shapes, this almost looks like an illustration from a children's book.



SF Zero 3

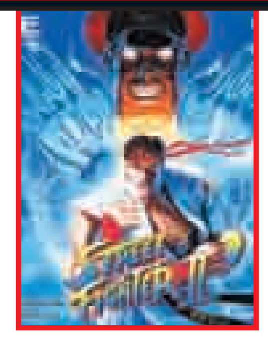
FORMAT: Saturn
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1999
■ Hmm… While this initially looks very nice, closer inspection reveals that some character drawings look a little unrefined. And the 'busy' composition means that there's no focal point. Must try harder.

SF Zero 3 Upper



FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 2002
■ Thanks to the shape of Japanese GBA boxes, this piece of art works perfectly. Your eye is drawn to Ryu on the left, and fans will enjoy spotting all the other characters hidden in the background.

SFII: Champion Edition



FORMAT: PC Engine
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1993
■ One of the most memorable *SFII* boxes, this featured the same art as *Special Champion Edition* on the Mega Drive. We're a bit worried about Ryu's tiny eyes, but that leering M Bison in the background is ace.

Street Fighter II: Turbo



FORMAT: SNES
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1993
■ This is certainly vibrant and colourful, and has a great focal point, but there's something not quite right about the style. Chun Li is looking a wee bit anaemic, and Ken seems to be launching out of her head.

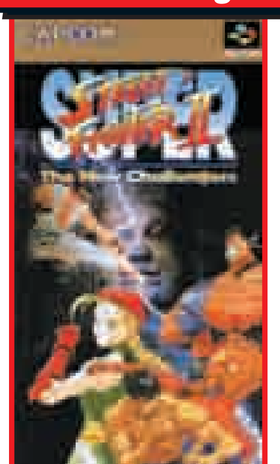
Super SFII: Turbo



FORMAT: 3DO
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1994

■ Featuring a selection of character sketches and a chessboard-like red and black grid, this is one of the more creative *Street Fighter* covers. Unfortunately, it doesn't really sell the game and it has a 3DO logo on it, which never helps…

Super SFII: The New Challengers



FORMAT: SNES
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1994

■ Ooh, yes, we like this… *Super Street Fighter II* introduced four new fighters, all featured on the box in a sophisticated manga style. Ryu is also included to keep things old-school, and the face in the background ties in with the anime movie.

SF Alpha



FORMAT: GB Color
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 2000

■ One of the best pieces of *Street Fighter* art to date, this features the two most popular fighters in action. The vibrancy of the colours used makes for a box that's vivid and eye-catching. Very nice. Well done.

SF III: W Impact

FORMAT: Dreamcast
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1999

■ The style of this piece is quite different from most *Street Fighter* artwork, and it mirrors the grungy look of *SFIII* very well. Unfortunately, the composition isn't great and Alex (on the right) isn't a particularly popular character.

SF Zero 2



FORMAT: Saturn
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1996

■ While there's nothing wrong with the style of this Saturn box art, the proportions of the characters don't look quite right. Ryu, for example, looks about 14 and as though he's suffering a nasty bout of mumps.

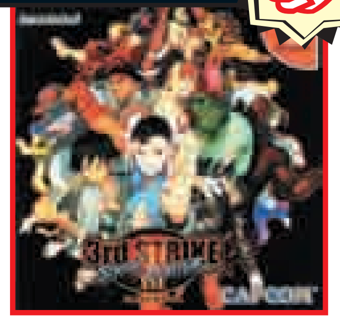
SF Zero 2



FORMAT: SNES
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 1996

■ With two of the most popular characters on the cover, this *Street Fighter* box succeeds in just about every way. The cool colour palette works well, and the placement of the two fighters balances out the composition nicely. We do have to question the buboes that seem to be peeking out of Akuma's shirt, though.

SF III: 3rd Strike



FORMAT: Dreamcast
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 2000

■ Aside from the fact that the faces don't look quite like the ones in the game, this is a superb composition, complete with a decent focal point and plenty of detail and colour. Definitely one of the better *SF* boxes.

Street Fighter II: Turbo Master Challenge



FORMAT: Dreamcast
REGION: Japan
RELEASED: 2000

■ This is a great character sketch, but the way it's cut out and overlaid onto the charcoal background looks like an Eighties Athena poster.



SF II: Turbo



FORMAT: SNES
REGION: US
RELEASED: 1993

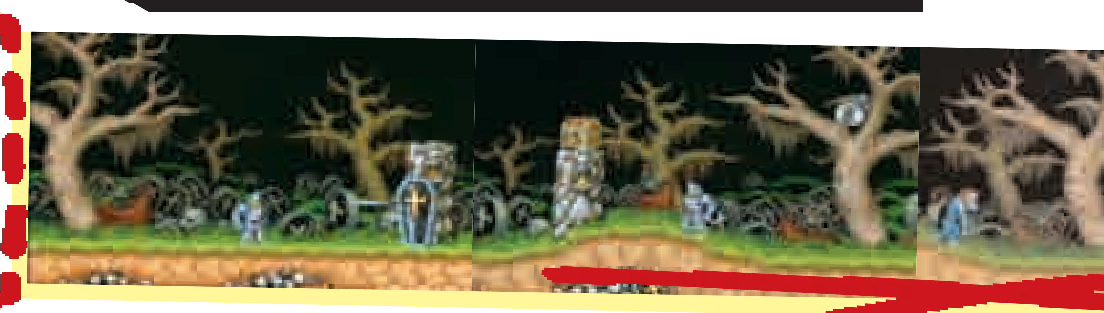
■ This CGI-enhanced style of artwork isn't popular with purists, but you have to admit that it actually looks quite a lot like the game.

This Month:

Step-by-Step

SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

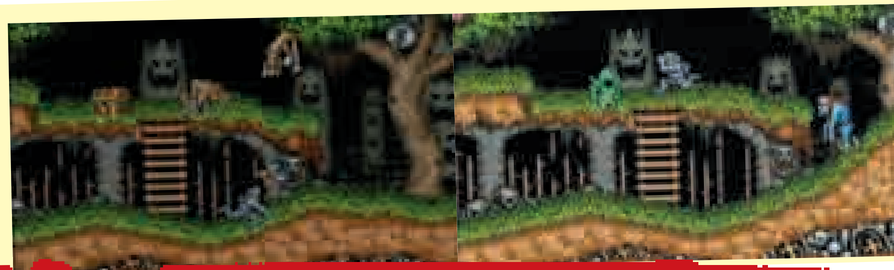
STEPS 1-3
An easy start. Hang around the first pillar long enough to pick up the Chest that appears. You need to avoid the Flame power-up, but you knew that…





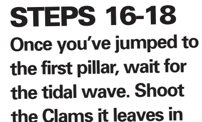
STEPS 7-9
Take out the lone flaming Skull then make your way under the next raised platform. Destroy the flaming Skeletons and exit on the far right of the mound.



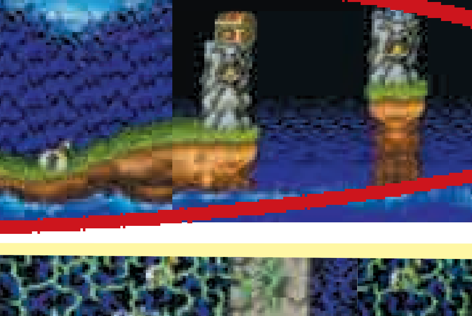


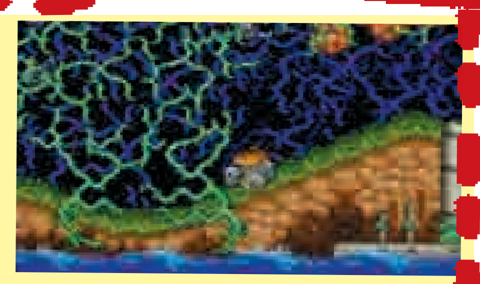
STEPS 13-15
You've more shifting ground to negotiate here, as well as more murderous Dogs and plenty of tumbling Skulls. Hang in there as you're nearly at the checkpoint.

STEPS 16-18
Once you've jumped to the first pillar, wait for the tidal wave. Shoot the Clams it leaves in its wake and try to grab yet another Treasure Chest before you reach dry land.

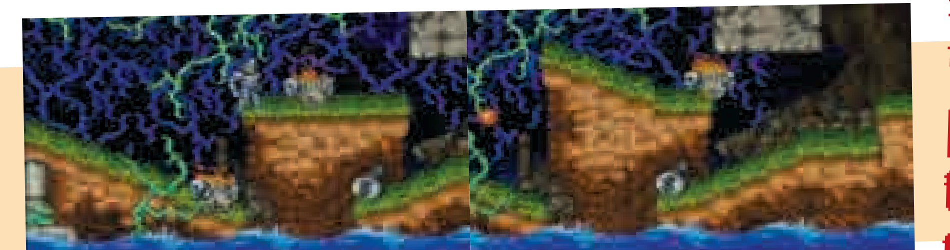






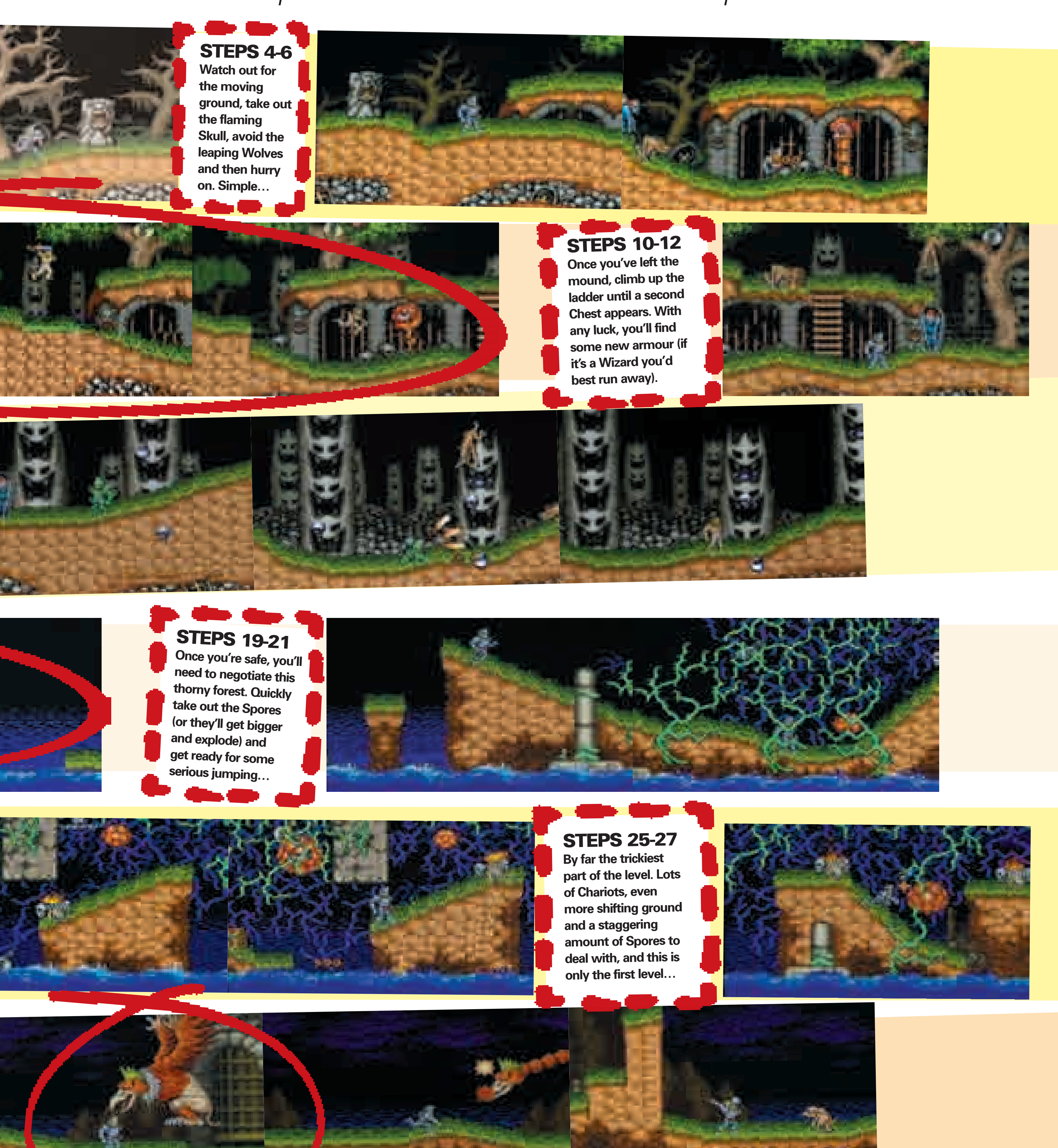


STEPS 22-24
You'll notice some Skeleton Chariots here. As soon as you move too far, the ground will shift and they'll hurtle towards you. Make sure you've mastered the double-jump.



STEPS 28-30
Avoid the Eggs this guy throws at you, sidestep that stretchy neck and fill him with more metal than a Van Halen concert. Pick up the Key and you can tackle level 2.

Capcom's titles have never been a walkover, and this was made all too clear with the SNES release of Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts. At least we can help with the first level…



STEPS 4-6
Watch out for the moving ground, take out the flaming Skull, avoid the leaping Wolves and then hurry on. Simple…

STEPS 10-12
Once you've left the mound, climb up the ladder until a second Chest appears. With any luck, you'll find some new armour (if it's a Wizard you'd best run away).

STEPS 19-21
Once you're safe, you'll need to negotiate this thorny forest. Quickly take out the Spores (or they'll get bigger and explode) and get ready for some serious jumping…

STEPS 25-27
By far the trickiest part of the level. Lots of Chariots, even more shifting ground and a staggering amount of Spores to deal with, and this is only the first level…

Retro Contact

Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact

The games may be old but the debates are still fresh. If you're a fan of retro gaming there's always plenty to talk about, so why not share your views with like-minded old-school button bashers?

MY HEAD IS SPINNING

Dear games™,
It was interesting to read in your magazine that Dizzy might be making a comeback (issue 14). I was a massive fan of the originals (I've still got a couple of them up in the loft, in fact), and have always wondered why they've never brought him back on a modern console.

Then again, after seeing that dodgy screenshot in your publication and later watching the teaser trailer on the internet, I've realised that bringing him back might not be the best idea after all. Although the footage certainly looked respectable enough from a technical point of view, it didn't really resurrect that classic *Dizzy* atmosphere fans would expect. Perhaps I'm better off sticking to emulating the classic titles on my PC, or even having a rummage around in the loft.
Kevin Bell via email

■ We have to admit that we were similarly underwhelmed with the recent *Dizzy* footage, but it's worth remembering that, for the time being at least, it is just an experiment to gauge how much interest people still have in the series – apparently there are still no plans to resurrect the king of the Yolk Folk.

What's perhaps more interesting is that the Bitmap Brothers (now running Blitz Games) seem to have talked through their differences with Codemasters as both companies' logos are on the video. Let's hope that if they do go ahead with a brand new *Dizzy* game, the two firms can remain on good terms for long enough to get the thing finished.

On the subject of retro remakes, though, we really don't understand why developers would want to risk tarnishing the good names of their retro titles by releasing half-hearted sequels. Classics such as *Sonic The Hedgehog*, for instance, are stripped of their dignity when awful spin-offs and sequels like *Sonic Battle* and *Sonic Shuffle* are released.

Don't developers realise that they're killing potentially profitable franchises by releasing such tat? Who do they think they're appealing to with these releases anyway? The fans certainly aren't going to buy them.

The Ultra Paperboy

Dear games™,
Last month you featured a piece about *Paperboy* and how good it would be if it was remade (issue 14), but I'm sure an updated version of the game was released for the N64. I've never actually played it myself, but I'm fairly certain that I've seen it on the internet.
James Hardy via email



■ You're quite right, James, *Paperboy* was released for the N64 but we chose not to feature it in the magazine as it was so awful. In retrospect, we should at least have acknowledged its existence, though it wouldn't have affected our opinions on a remake. We're fans of the original game, and if someone could take that formula and expand it for the current generation they could be onto a winner.

With the N64 game, Midway merely took the basic dynamics and created a selection of bland, fuzzy locations that had very little in common with what we all remember and love about *Paperboy*. We just want to find out if the scientist to the left of the paperboy on the box is any relation to Dr. Muto, though, as he certainly looks very similar…

Treasures From The Deep



Dear games™,
I went into an arcade when I was on holiday recently and to my surprise they had a copy of *Ocean Hunter* in there. I'm not sure if you've covered this before or whether you intend to in the future, but I didn't even know that it was released in the UK.

I had a couple of goes (it was £1 per play) and got fairly far into it as it wasn't very difficult. I wouldn't say it was one of SEGA's better games but it was quite an experience thanks to the enormous sit-down cabinet which surrounds you as if you're in a submarine.
Dave Spencer via email

■ You're not wrong when you say it wasn't one of SEGA's better games – we thought *Ocean Hunter* was bland and rather boring.

That said, there's something rather charming about it. If you watched the introduction sequence, you may have noticed that the characters aren't dissimilar to the ones from *Nights Into Dreams* on the Saturn; and the innovative collage-style animation adds style and the grand sea-shanty music score is truly inspired. Watch out for more on *Ocean Hunter* in a future issue.

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

Dear games™,
Back in issue 12 your retro section contained a feature about Capcom and in it you mentioned that the SNES version of *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was the closest to the arcade original. However, as a *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* fan I can assure you that the SNES version was nothing like the arcade version as it was a completely different game that had been built from scratch for the console.
Darren Jacobson via email

■ We've actually had quite a few readers writing in about this, though we are already well aware of the differences. Although many were confused by our comment, what we were referring to was merely the technical side of the game, rather than the design.

You see, thanks to the Super Nintendo's graphics processors and additional colours over the Mega Drive, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* looked extremely similar to the arcade game, despite the differences in its structure. That said, it wasn't a completely new game – many of the bosses used exactly the same attack patterns, even though they were redrawn for the console version. Essentially, then, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was more of a remix.

SOUL II SOUL

Dear games™,
I just don't get it! What I mean is, I just can't understand the current obsession with retro gaming – all my friends who reckon they're real hardcore gamers won't shut up about it. What's the point in playing old, rubbish games when you could be playing brand new ones with better graphics, better animation, better plots and more intricate controls?

The other day, a friend house was telling me about all these great 'classic' games he'd bought for his SEGA Saturn – the only problem was that when he gleefully loaded each of them up I discovered they were all awful. There was a lame platformer called *Astal*, and he had all these rubbish 2D beat-'em-ups like *Samurai Shodown 4* (which even needed a special cartridge to work). I didn't have the heart to tell him that he'd been fleeced, but instead I made my excuses and went home to play *Soul Calibur II* on my PS2.
Noel Bailey, Staffordshire

■ It sounds like you're missing the point. A lot of people enjoy playing older titles purely for nostalgia, not necessarily because the games are any better than those in the shops today. Saying that, there have always been good and bad games, and although there are new platformers that are better than *Astal*, there are also many that are much worse.

As for comparing *Samurai Shodown 4* to *Soul Calibur II*, there are certainly similarities between them but we wouldn't say that one was clearly better than the other. *Samurai Shodown 4*, for example, relies heavily on timing, while *Soul Calibur II* is more about reflexes and special moves. Besides, *Soul Blade* (*Soul Calibur*'s predecessor) could now be classed as a retro game, and without it *Soul Calibur II* may never have been made.

As far as we're concerned, it doesn't matter how old or new a game is as long as it's fun to play.

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to say, why not write to us at:
games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment Limited, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS
Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk



CLASSIC CONSOLE

BUYERS GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- **NAME:** GAME BOY
- **PRICE:** £10
- **THREE OF THE BEST:** *Revenge Of The Gator* (est. price £5) *Super Mario Land 2* (est. price £8) *Golf* (est. price £5)
- Seeing as Game Boys are so cheap these days, there's really no excuse why anyone should be without one (other than the fact that they probably already own a GBA, that is).

HOW TO USE GAMES TRADING MARKET

SELLING

To sell items on GTM, simply list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on GTM, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING

To buy an item from GTM, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

WANTED

If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

GTM RULES AND SMALL PRINT

This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. GTM is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Highbury Entertainment Ltd cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.

FOR SALE

Lot 43 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color (clear vinyl) including *Sonic* and *Pac-Man*. Boxed as new. £80. Barnes.

Lot 46 – Atari VCS 2600 (woody) with two joysticks, four paddles, plus games including *Space Invaders* and *Missile Command*. Working with PSU. Open to offers. Coventry.

Lot 47 – Sinclair Spectrum 48k with tons of games, including *Skool Daze* and *Gauntlet*. Two joysticks. Working with PSU. Open to offers. Coventry.

Lot 48 – V-Lab/Virtual Lab for Virtual Boy. New condition. £300 plus p+p. Surrey.

Lot 49 – American GCE Vectrex with 14 games, including *Star Trek Blitz* and *Berserk* (ten of which have instructions). Also, Artmaster with instructions and lightgun. System and games in excellent condition, screens and instructions in good condition. $500 o.n.o. Massachusetts, USA.

Lot 50 – Boxed SEGA Saturn with 12 games, all boxed with instructions. All leads, two pads and one demo disc included, though the console box is missing its internal packaging. £60. Lancs.

Lot 51 – *Final Fantasy VIII* (PAL) for PSone. Boxed but no instructions. £3.50 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 52 – *Hellfire* (NTSC) for Mega Drive. Boxed, instructions. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 53 – *Knight Lore* for Spectrum. Boxed with instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 54 – *Star Wars Arcade* for Atari VCS. Boxed with instructions. £8 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 55 – *Uridium* for C64. Boxed with instructions. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 56 – *King Of Fighters 2002* (Japanese version) for Neo-Geo AES. Mint condition. £220. Gloucester.

Lot 57 – *Samurai Spirits 4* (Japanese version) for Neo-Geo AES. Mint condition. £250. Gloucester.

Lot 58 – *Soukyogurentai (Otokuyo)* (Japanese version) for SEGA Saturn. Mint condition with spine card. £50. Gloucester.

Lot 59 – *Ghost In The Shell* (PAL) for PSone. Mint condition. £15. Gloucester.

Lot 60 – *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* for SEGA Dreamcast. Mint condition. £25. Gloucester.

Lot 61 – *Bubble Bobble* (UK version) for Commodore 64. Complete. 50p plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 62 – *Escape From Singe's Castle* (UK version) for Commodore 64. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks.

Lot 63 – *Streets Of Rage 2* (PAL) for SEGA Mega Drive. Complete. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks.

WANTED

WANTED 23 – *King Of Fighters 2001* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes.

WANTED 24 – *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes.

WANTED 25 – *Ikaruga* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay up to £20. Barnes.

WANTED 26 – *The Secret Of Mana* for Super Nintendo. Any condition accepted, providing it works. Manchester.

WANTED 27 – SNES or Mega Drive. Will pay up to £20. Bristol.

WANTED 28 – Any interesting JAMMA arcade boards, arcade cabinets etc. Also looking for a Neo-Geo MVS motherboard.

WANTED 29 – *Samba De Amigo* plus maracas for SEGA Dreamcast. Will pay well. Warwickshire.

WANTED 30 – *Burning Rangers* for SEGA Saturn (UK or US versions only). Will pay £20-£30. Middlesex.

WANTED 31– *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for SEGA Saturn (UK or US versions only). Will pay £60-£85. Middlesex.

WANTED 32 – Two MB Vectrex control pads plus any other related accessories in good working order. West Mids.

WANTED 33 – *Metal Slug 3* for Neo-Geo (AES). Must be complete and in good condition. Gloucester.

WANTED 34 – *Disc World* for PSone. Must be complete and in good condition. Gloucester.



GAMES™ RETRO CLASSIFIEDS

Send to: **GTM, games™, Highbury Entertainment Ltd, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS or email gtm@paragon.co.uk**

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Address..

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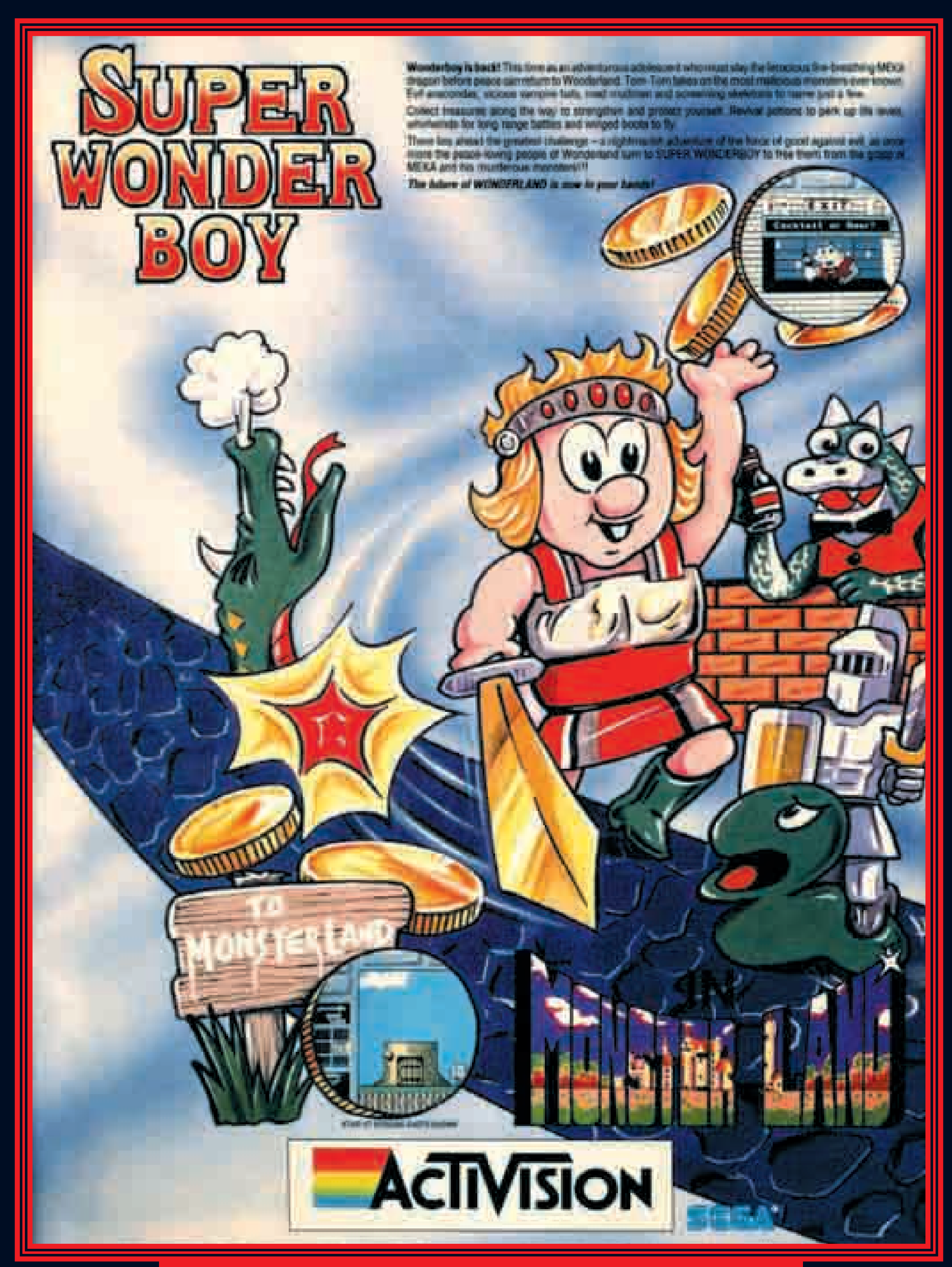
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Tick classified heading

☐ **FOR SALE** ☐ **WANTED**

Write your advertisement here, one word per box, and only include your name, address, phone number and/or email address below if you want them printed



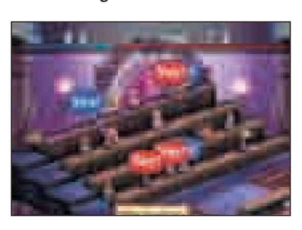
SUPER WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND (Various home systems) Activision, 1989 – UK advertisement


eMag

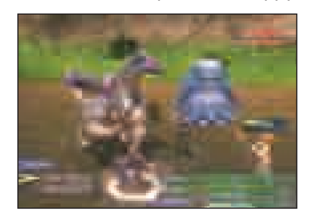
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

VIEWPOINT
DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS
Wow. That's pretty much all we can say about Atlus' surprisingly deep and enjoyable strategy RPG, although between this, *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* and *Advance Wars 2*, you'd think we've got some kind of fetish.



VIEWPOINT
FINAL FANTASY X-2
While we're obviously pleased that EA has confirmed it'll be handling the UK release of Square's continuing saga, we can't help feel that the game itself is a little lacking in certain areas. Regardless, it'll certainly keep the fans happy.



VIEWPOINT
MANHUNT
Well, there's a surprise. Having been worried that Rockstar's über-violent snuff game would fail to live up to expectations, we weren't disappointed – even though we were, if you catch our drift. And we weren't the only ones who thought it was lame…



PLAYSTATION2

MANUFACTURER Sony **UK LAUNCH DATE** 24 November 2000 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £139.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

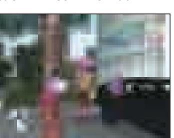
No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Enough content to keep you going for ages
3	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House	If you only own one football game, it should be this
4	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
5	Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
6	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	Ubisoft shows how to make a proper retro update
7	Rez	SEGA	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
8	Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
9	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
10	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
11	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House	Konami's RPG series is still as good as it ever was
12	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House	Old-school shooting has never been so much fun
13	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
14	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
15	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
16	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
17	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
18	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
19	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
20	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot

5… 4… 3… 2… 1

Ico
By now you should have realised that we're not going to stop telling you to buy *Ico*. It's a crime if you don't.



GTA: Vice City
Rockstar's free-roaming franchise just keeps on rolling. No doubt the twin pack will sell like mad…



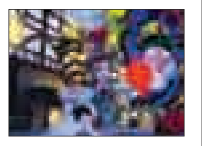
Pro Evolution Soccer 3
Considering Konami's series exists, you have to wonder why other people keep making footy games.

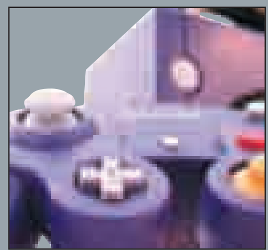


Tony Hawk's Underground
Neversoft's new take on the franchise might be a bit 'different', but that doesn't stop it being great.



Dark Chronicle
As RPG games go, this is a bit of a monster. You'll be lucky if you can do it all in a mere 60 hours.






XBOX

MANUFACTURER Microsoft **UK LAUNCH DATE** 13 March 2002 **MEDIA** 4.75-inch DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £129.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.

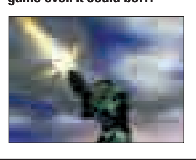
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie	The game that sold a million Xbox consoles
2	Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	Redefining how we play games online
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
4	Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	In-House	Who needs Solid Snake when you've got Sam Fisher?
5	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit	Classic shoot-'em-up action, the SEGA way
8	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
9	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
10	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios	Arcade racing at its purest – fun with a capital F
11	Beyond Good & Evil IMPORT	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
13	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk* of the snowboarding world
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax	Bargain-priced motorbike racing action
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a title
16	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis	Surprisingly enjoyable, considering the competition
17	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	Top-notch squad-based action with an arcade twist
18	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House	Realistic racing for the purist in all of us
19	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games	More than just *Tony Hawk* on water
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House	Young Mr Woods shows us all how it should be done

CHEGGERS PLAYS POP

Halo

Like it or not, there's an awful lot of people out there who think *Halo* is the best game ever. It could be…



Project Gotham Racing 2

We admit it – we're addicted to online racing. If only because it means we've got loads more friends.



Jet Set Radio Future

It might have a lot to answer for as far as cel-shading goes, but we still love a bit of graffiti.



Splinter Cell

Ubisoft really rewrote the book on stealth games when it came to Sam Fisher's daring adventures.



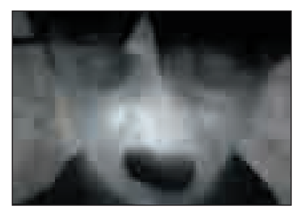
Star Wars: KOTOR

Believe the hype – as long as you can take all the stats, this really is the best *Star Wars* game in ages.



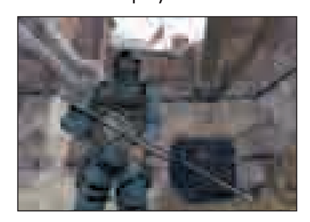
VIEWPOINT
PROJECT ZERO

Crimson Butterfly, *Project Zero*'s long-awaited sequel, has finally arrived in the US, meaning it's time to get out from behind the sofa and put this one to bed. Scary games don't come much better than this one – make sure you've got a cushion ready.



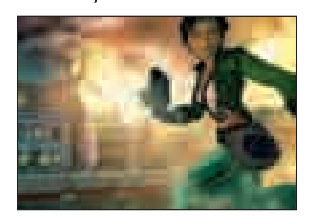
VIEWPOINT
COUNTER-STRIKE

It isn't exactly what we were hoping for in terms of promised quality (half the things the free download had, but with a £40 price tag?), but at least *Counter-Strike* manages to deliver some of the fun that the PC version offered when played online.



VIEWPOINT
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

What with its PS2-exclusive release in the UK and EA's assault on the games charts at Christmas, it's perhaps no surprise that *BG&E* hasn't done as well as it deserves so far. Hopefully, that'll change when it goes multiformat later this year.



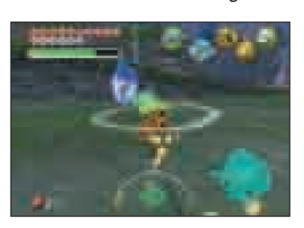
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VIEWPOINT

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BONUS DISC

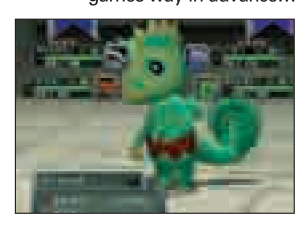
Yes, so maybe this is becoming harder to get than most other 'freebies', but there's no denying that three of the best *Zelda* games (and the second NES title) on a single disc is one of the most essential things ever.



VIEWPOINT

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

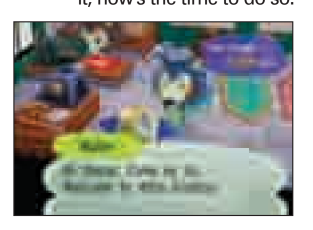
Out now in Japan, Nintendo's latest franchise filler has driven our resident Pokémon experts to backflips of excitement. Of course, they don't have the foggiest what's going on, but that's the price you pay for buying games way in advance…



VIEWPOINT

ANIMAL CROSSING

Now here's the thing – even though most of us are bored of waiting for Nintendo to decide to release this in the UK, we know plenty of places where you can buy the Australian PAL version instead. If you haven't already got it, now's the time to do so.



GAMECUBE

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 3 May 2002 **MEDIA** 3-inch Optical Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
1	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	A genre-redefining title in every sense
2	Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube
3	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	SEGA does it again with a brilliant retro remake
4	Winning Eleven 6 IMPORT	Konami	In-House	The closest you'll get to *Pro Evolution…*
5	Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical	More multiplayer fun than most other FPS games
7	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
8	Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
9	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
10	Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
11	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
12	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
13	Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
14	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House	An interesting twist on the *Resident Evil* franchise
15	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	SEGA	Overworks	Absorbing RPG action with added 'arrrr' factor
16	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
17	1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	In-House	A markedly different game to the competition
18	Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	Neversoft	The defining moment in the *Tony Hawk* series
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5	Forget the follow-up – the original still has the edge
20	Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year

SATURDAY SWAP SHOP

Metroid Prime
The only game so far to score a perfect ten in the magazine – shouldn't that tell you something?



Zelda: The Wind Waker
Forget what people said about Link's new cel-shaded look being bad – they were wrong. Really wrong.



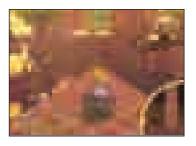
F-Zero GX
Faster than a speeding bullet? Oh yes. In fact, *F-Zero* is faster than a speeding bullet that's already late.

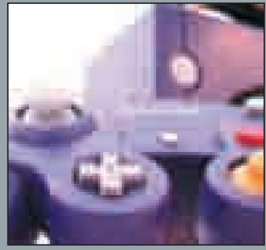


Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution
***Pro Evo's* never coming out on the Cube, so you'll have to make do with this…**



Super Monkey Ball 2
Any game with monkeys in it is great – that's the law. But then we'd still love this even if we didn't have to.






GBA

MANUFACTURER Nintendo **UK LAUNCH DATE** 22 June 2001
MEDIA Flash Cartridge **CURRENT PRICE** £89.99



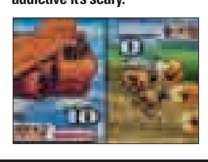
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available now.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

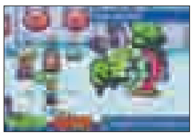
No.	Title	Publisher		Developer
1	Advance Wars 2	Nintendo		In-House
2	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo		AlphaDream
3	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo		In-House
4	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo		Square-Enix
5	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo		In-House
6	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo		Camelot
7	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo		In-House
8	Fire Emblem	Nintendo		In-House
9	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami		In-House
10	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo		In-House
11	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo		Crawfish
12	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft		Crawfish
13	Yu-Gi-Oh!: Stairway To The Destined Duel	Konami		In-House
14	Super Mario Advance 4: SMB 3	Nintendo		In-House
15	Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubisoft		Binary 9
16	Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo		In-House
17	Legend Of Stafi	Nintendo	IMPORT	In-House
18	Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami		In-House
19	Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator	Electronic Arts		In-House
20	Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo		In-House

TISWAS

Advance Wars 2
You wouldn't think that strategy games would be so much fun, but this one's so addictive it's scary.



Mario & Luigi
A genuinely fresh and playable Mario game that's not a remake of an old SNES title. Absolutely brilliant.



Zelda: Link To The Past
The SNES port is fantastic on its own, but combine that with *Four Swords* and you've got an unmissable title.



PC

MANUFACTURER N/A **UK LAUNCH DATE** N/A
MEDIA 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **CURRENT PRICE** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

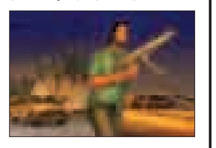
No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	The Sims	EA	Maxis
2	Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
3	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
4	Championship Manager 03/04	Eidos	Sports Interactive
5	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
6	Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
7	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
8	Medieval: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
9	Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
10	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
11	System Shock	EA	Looking Glass Games
12	Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
13	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
14	Commandos 2: Men Of Courage	Eidos	Pyro
15	Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
16	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
17	Day of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
18	Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
19	Battlefield 1942	EA	Digital Illusions
20	Unreal Tournament 2003	Atari	Epic Games

NO. 73

The Sims
Milked for all it's worth and yet still as great as it was when it first appeared. You've got to love *The Sims*.

Deus Ex
Freeform gaming as it was meant to be; if only all games were this way. We can't wait for the sequel to arrive.

GTA: Vice City
Looks better than its PS2 cousin, and still has just as much 'cool' factor to keep PC gamers playing for ages.




NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
ON SALE 26

NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

The race to be Best Game of 2004 has begun – but will the likes of *Doom III*, *007: Everything Or Nothing*, *Battlefield Vietnam* or *Fable* come out on top?

MORE… REVIEWS

You want top games? Then try *Siren*, *OutRun 2*, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, *Armed And Dangerous*, *Mafia* and *Headhunter: Redemption* for size…

MORE… FEATURES

We head out to meet Swordfish (one of the newest developers in town), talk exclusively to the man who put the 'god' in god games, and ask exactly why we should care about the death of British games development.

Please note: Due to late code and unforseen circumstances and stuff, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it.

Can Eidos top its classic FPS RPG with a follow-up that's already been branded 'too simple'? We'll have the full multiformat review…



180 PAGES OF BIONICALLY ENHANCED ACTION

FEB 04

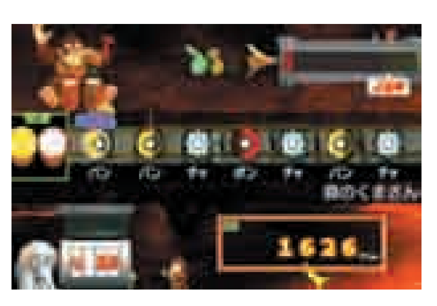
CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THE LONG WINTER EVENINGS HAVE SENT YOU SCURRYING TO YOUR WRITING DESKS TO SCRIBBLE DOWN SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT GAMING…



New year, new topics? Fat chance. You're all still fretting about casual gamers and Nintendo. Although we do have a few new subjects to run up our flagpole and flutter in the breeze…



MAKING CONTACT

☐ **There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:**

games™
Highbury Entertainment Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

☐ However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

☐ Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

☐ **Step One:**
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

☐ **Step Two:**
Type the following into the browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the 'forum' icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

☐ **Step Three:**
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**procrastinate**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

☐ **2003 HAS CERTAINLY** been a cracking year for gamers, but what does 2004 have in store? Looking at the release schedules, I would say that we can look forward to another golden year of gaming. The year ahead looks to offer *Halo 2*, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, *Donkey Konga*, *Pikmin 2*, *BC*, *Gran Turismo 4*, *Fable*, *Half-Life 2* and *Doom III* to name but a few.

However, along with these 'triple-A' titles we'll inevitably have the usual deluge of updates, poor sequels and licences, which, to be honest, will probably sell by the bucket-load. Should we let this concern us? After all, if people are having fun who are we to say what they should and shouldn't play?

I think the real question is, how do you make the more mainstream gamer (who buys maybe two or three games a year) buy the quality titles and leave the poorly developed games on the shelves where they rightly belong?

Nicholas Cory

games™: So, er, what you're saying is that 2004 will be exactly the same as 2003? Educating mainstream gamers should be the preserve of magazines such as **games™**, and over the course of the year we will be championing gaming in the way that we'd like to think we did in 2003. But don't forget the power of word of mouth – if you've played a great game then tell people. The Stereophonics, when they weren't being utterly tedious, were right when they said that word gets around…

☐ **RECENTLY, FOR THE** first time in my life, I have been genuinely concerned about the future of the videogame industry. I have studied various release lists for 2004 and many of the games being released, good as they are shaping up to be, are sequels. This isn't necessarily a bad thing as they're sequels to great games. The big problem is that sequels contribute to, and actively promote, unoriginality.

With the inevitable *FIFA*s that get released each year and sell by the truckload, developers are getting scared. Many companies have dropped out of the videogame race, and all because of the ordinary gamer. I've got nothing against such people but they're misinformed. They see *FIFA*, they know the name, they buy it when a lovely copy of *Prince Of Persia* is sat right beside it. I fear that developers will stop making original games because of this, and the whole games market will be full of crap.

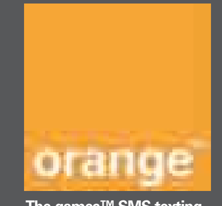
Thank god for Nintendo, eh? Well, perhaps not. The Nintendo that always produced the highest quality, most original games is slowly fading away. I dread to think this, but *Mario Party 5*, anyone? I know that the once venerable company is still capable of producing stunning games such as *Metroid Prime*, *Zelda: The Wind Waker* and *Mario Sunshine*, but I still can't help thinking that Nintendo is losing sight of the values that once made it great.

"UBISOFT MUST BE CRYING INTO ITS CANAPÉS AT THE DISMAL PERFORMANCE OF BEYOND GOOD & EVIL AND PRINCE OF PERSIA"

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What's the best way to convince gamers to pick up *Prince Of Persia* instead of *FIFA*?



Perhaps it's not as bad as I think. But whatever the future of videogames, I'll be happy playing *Super Mario World* if everything goes pear-shaped.
Kyle Hudspeth

games™: Good Lord. Casual gamers and Nintendo in one letter – our two favourite topics… First off, I think we're all agreed that Nintendo needs all the help it can get to withstand the rise of the PS2 and Xbox, so can we really blame it for releasing a guaranteed seller like *Mario Party 5* (which is actually a good little game) to fund projects like *Wind Waker* and *Metroid*? Similarly, 'casual gamers' are probably doing the games industry a favour by buying sequels and licensed games. This way, developers can raise the cash to pay for less mainstream products. The only thing that really matters is that people enjoy videogames whether it's every day, once a month or simply at Christmas, and no-one really has the right to judge people for that or criticise someone's level of commitment.

I HAVE BEEN reading several articles lately about the elderly taking over gaming from their younger counterparts, as if old folk have just discovered something new. Life in the fast lane started for me years ago watching a small dot jump from side to side on the television screen. From there it was just a simple progression.

The SNES came into our lives with little marvels like *Bomberman*, *Donkey Kong* and *Zelda*. The computer kicked in with *Tomb Raider*, *Broken Sword* and many others. Not to forget my beloved Dreamcast and, of course, games and games of *Shenmue*, which I am currently playing for the ninth time – there's not much dusting done here!

The acquisition of a PSX brought *Alundra*, *Final Fantasy* (before Square lost the plot) and the wonderful *Suikoden* with hundreds of hours of fun (which still offers many hours of entertainment today), plus many, many more. Now the PS2 and the GameCube all offer great, if short-lived, games for my enjoyment. *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* took a week to complete and *Prince Of Persia*, wonderful that it is, is nearly finished. *Dark Chronicle* took longer and was very absorbing but I am waiting for new arrivals such as *Suikoden III*, and perhaps other decent RPGs. *Zelda* on the GameCube was good, and with the special attachment I can play *Golden Sun* and the other goodies produced for the GBA.

The bonuses are that my grandchildren love to visit and I don't have to watch television, which is, after all, for old people. The newspapers, as usual, have got it all wrong; we are the old converts who for years have enjoyed the challenges presented to us by gaming and we probably have sharper brains as a result.
Christina Towler

games™: There's little doubt that people of all ages can and do enjoy games, though why the media recently chose to get all excited about this is a mystery. We find it amazing that given the breadth of gaming experiences on offer, and the fact that the pastime is over 20 years old, people still think that gaming should be the preserve of young people. 'Television is for old people', though? Say it ain't so…

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE...

☐ If Peter Moleneux picked a peck of pickled pepper, where's the peck of pickled Moleneux that Peter Pepper picked? Work THAT one out!
gamesTM: It's a trick question. Ha!

☐ Your contact pages have hardly any room for letters. Shorten the border crap. Word.
gamesTM: What? We have just enough room for letters, thank you. See, the ones on this page fit perfectly…

☐ Well done for putting James Baker back in his place (contact section issue 13). I get so sick of reading the same old crap arguments. Dont like it, dont play it.
gamesTM: Imagine what it's like reading the majority of the letters that get sent in every month…

☐ Has any one else had a problem with the voice comunicator i can't use the blasted thing because my heads too big. Curse my melon shaped head!
gamesTM: You are wearing it properly, aren't you? Around the back of the head, not over the top of it…

☐ MAMA MIA! I finaly finished Super Mario Sunshine after four months of drudgery and false starts. Now I can stick is back on the shelf and forget that it ever existed
gamesTM: We're all for completing games no matter how long it takes – it's the only way to get value for money.

☐ DON'T GIVE EVOS!
gamesTM: OKAY, WE WON'T!

☐ U must understand i don't agree with all ur reviews. True Crime rocks, kind of.
gamesTM: Review scores are just opinions – one man's meat and all that, but we are glad that you gleaned some sort of enjoyment from *True Crime*. Someone had to.

☐ If one more person comes into my store to buy Rising Sun, I'm going to shove your review in their face, screaming "You weakminded fools! A pox on you!"
gamesTM: Harsh, but probably fair. You might prefer a more gentle approach (and perhaps point out a better game)… actually, no, we like your way.

☐ Yo bazariah here, just want to let the world know i bought 7 us cube games inc burnout 2 and freedom fighters for the sweet price of £35 woo-hoo
gamesTM: Woo, and indeed, hoo…

"HOW DO YOU MAKE MAINSTREAM GAMERS BUY QUALITY TITLES AND LEAVE THE POORLY DEVELOPED GAMES ON THE SHELVES?"

☐ **I'VE BEEN PLAYING** games for 13 years and I have seen hundreds of gaming heroes. Reading comics at the same time has shown a great contrast to games. During my late school days I found that comics were really good at portraying black people. Characters like Storm, Bishop and Blade are some of the most original. Games, however, have a habit of making black characters lumbering oafs, criminals, pimps, or cool, street-cred dudes. Comics seemed to have progressed better over the years but games haven't. Is this because a comic needs a good script and strong characters?

RPGs are supposed to have good scripts and characters, yet they have some of the worst

LETTER OF THE MONTH

☐ **YOUR ARTICLE 'DOES** Exactly What it Says On The Tin' (issue 11) got me thinking. Branding is the cornerstone of advertising and has driven the sales of products as diverse as cola and motorcars for the last hundred years. So it's no surprise that the companies starting to flounder in the competitive world of videogame publishing and development don't seem to grasp that the same rules apply whether you're selling a packet of crisps or a console game.

Ubisoft must be crying into its canapés at the dismal performance of *Beyond Good & Evil* and *Prince Of Persia*. It's clear why they failed – both are great games, but both lack clear branding and target audiences. It's a mistake you can't see EA making. It, more than any of its peers, treats the gamer as a consumer. It's a strategy that works – EA's immaculate presentation, key licences and big-name sequels trample through the all-format games chart like buffalos on acid, month after month.

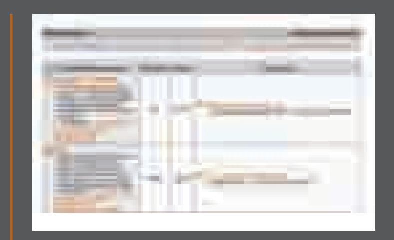
Ico, *Rez*, *Shenmue 2* and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* – all four were marketed through a variety of media, and all four were based on sound gaming principles. They didn't sell badly because the hardcore gaming community ignored them. They didn't sell badly because the reviews were harsh. They bombed because their brand identity sucked and their visibility to the general games consumer was negligible.

So, developers and publishers, we'll do our bit, but you've got to do yours. Don't give up on unique IPs and new gaming concepts. You might not have access to big names and licences but concentrate on selling what you do have to the general gaming public. They might not spend £40 on your game, but they might spend £40 on your brand…
Ben Thomas

gamesTM: That's an interesting point, so long as developers don't abandon new ideas in favour of established names or try too hard to develop something that can be easily marketed. Ubisoft seems to have got it right with the licence/unique title balance, so let's hope a few other companies can do the same.



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting…



FROM THE FORUM

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE, BUT DOES IT PAY TO WAIT FOR GAMES?

Hong Kong Phooey
Has anybody else noticed that some games are being sold 'on the cheap' shortly after being released? Game was selling (for a limited period) *Prince Of Persia*, *XIII* and *Billy Hatcher* for £19.99 each. Virgin has had *Beyond Good & Evil* selling for £20 (I think) and now Play is selling *Rainbow Six 3* for Xbox for £17.99. I've always enjoyed the buzz of buying a game on release day, playing it and then discussing it on forums. But with these recent offers I'm thinking that I'm better off waiting for a while to see if it gets reduced. Are these cheap prices purely for the Christmas period, or do you think it will continue next year? Are you a gamer that has to have a new game on day of release?

Number45
I can't help but pre-order the big games. It's a habit, and one that I wish I could kick because a few of the recent releases have been major letdowns. It's particularly bad for me because pretty much everything I get now is on import so I have to rely on eBay or forum trades for my return policy. To answer your question, I can forego saving a little if it means picking up games that I really want at the earliest opportunity!

Nitric
Because I'm poor I have to wait anyway, so I always get good deals. But I did buy *Zelda*, *Burnout 2* and *Def Jam Vendetta* on the day of release.

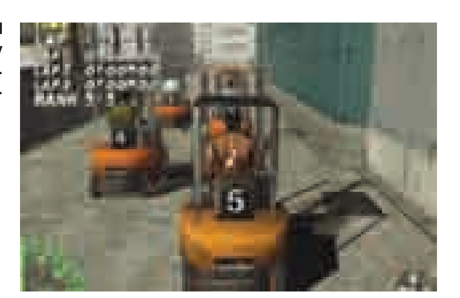
Big Boss
I only ever pre-order games I desperately want, then I enjoy the glory of bragging. Just as with all the DVDs I buy, they appear in special offers the next week. If only I was patient… I'll never learn

RetroBob
Some games just don't seem to get cheaper though, unlike DVDs. I've never seen *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* for much less than £30. Mind you, I haven't looked all that hard.

SuperAI
It's like anything, though – the longer you wait for something the cheaper it will become; you pay more for having something sooner. In some cases, prices seem to be dropping extremely quickly, in which case I'm not sure whether it's actually worth paying full price for an extra few weeks' play. That said, when you've been waiting ages for something, and then have to wait another few weeks when you know you could go out and buy it, it can be hard, probably impossible.

Master hunter
It's probably more to do with the Christmas period as I don't recall this happening before. As for getting a game on day of release, depends on the game really. If I have no doubts I will love a title (e.g. *Zelda*) it's bought as early as possible. If I have some doubts but will get it anyway I'll wait (e.g. *Eternal Darkness* and *Viewtiful Joe*, which I've left 'til Christmas for the last two years). Also depends on the timing. If it's released close to my birthday (February) I'll wait until then, as I will on the Xmas run-up. But if a game's out, say, June I have no big day to wait for so I'll just get it.

ApocalypseDude
It's mainly to do with the over-saturation of the Christmas market. A game like *Beyond Good & Evil* would have sold quite well in the summer, as it got good reviews and would have had little competition. Now it's competing against *FIFA*, *True Crime*, *Medal Of Honor*, *Max Payne 2*, *Need For Speed Underground*, *Tony Hawk's Underground*, *Prince Of Persia*, *WWE Smackdown* and so on. It's probably a lot better than most of these games, but at Christmas it simply won't shift. We dropped it to £19.99 in our place because we hadn't sold any at all.



Shenmue **is so good you'll want to play through it nine times. Well, you might.**

stereotypes in videogames. Barrett in *Final Fantasy VII* is one of the most recognised black characters in games but the most stereotyped I've ever seen. Japanese games seem to be the most narrow-minded in portraying black people. Birdie, DeeJay, Eddie Gordo and the guy in *Rival Schools* are all examples. Why are they all rubbish, stereotyped and have no significance in a game's progress whatsoever?

Your average fighting game has a golden rule of featuring the odd black person in the game, occasionally (rarely) two or more. Fantasy RPGs have the habit of not having a black person in them, and action games will always 99 times out of a hundred feature the black person as the sidekick or unimportant team member. These characters seem to have been made by the developers with no thought in them whatsoever.

I'm not saying that there has to be an important black person for every game created. It's just that they're represented poorly. Just look at the guy on the front of issue 12. Just because he's black doesn't mean he has to look cool and wear sunglasses. Black people play games too and should be portrayed correctly just like in sports games. We see black people on the front of licensed movie games and sports games all the time. Why not on some of the original games? Surely when you're an established games producer like EA, Rockstar or Square you can take a few gambles on games?

It doesn't matter if black people are a minority or not, they should at least be represented correctly from time to time. Let's hope we can see more games like *Halo 2* and *Half-Life 2*. Looking at their fantastic trailers and videos shows that not all black people in games have to be stereotyped. These games should be examples for the industry.
Abdullah Gumel

gamesTM: The problem seems to be that, as in cartoons, characters in games are essentially caricatures, and therefore stereotypes. Look at *Street Fighter II* – not all Japanese men are sumo wrestlers, not all women have hourglass figures and we're pretty sure that Dhalsim isn't a strictly accurate representation of all Indian men. But perhaps we have a vicious circle here. Gamers who want to see positive portrayals of black or ethnic minority characters will blame developers for failing to provide lead heroes or fairly represented supporting characters. But in an age where developers are relying on focus groups to decide game content, there must be, unfortunately, a significant proportion of gamers who are only responding to muscle-bound white guys or scantily clad women.

The fact that licensed games seem to offer a more balanced cross section of characters is no doubt due to the fact that they're based on real people (just look at the cover of *FIFA 2004*, for example). A developer could never justify replacing Ronaldinho with a crude stereotype.

As for the cover of issue 12, we're not entirely sure that a white character wouldn't be drawn in a similar way. Given the nature of *Unreal Tournament* it's pretty much a given that shades, big guns and 'looking cool' are de rigueur for the guys (as, apparently, are pointy metal brassieres for the ladies). We'd like to hear what other readers think about the issue of race in games. It's something we may explore in depth in future.



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